

St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Rickmansworth

Stockers Farm Road, Rickmansworth, WD3 1NY

Inspection dates 8–9 July 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.

- Recent improvements, speeded up by the current leadership team, have quickly raised the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- The acting headteacher very effectively evaluates how well the school is doing and what it needs to do to continue to improve.
- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teachers give pupils interesting tasks which motivate them to learn.
- Behaviour is good and pupils have very positive attitudes to their learning. They say they enjoy school and feel safe. Attendance is above average.
- Leaders have thorough systems for checking how well pupils are doing and quickly identify those in danger of falling behind.
- Governors know what they want the school to achieve and have improved the ways in which they check the school's work.
- Leaders have united staff in a common sense of purpose and strengthened communication with parents.
- Leaders give staff the training they need to do their work well and make sure they benefit from the expertise of others.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all pupils have enough opportunity to write at length.
- There is some variation in the quality of teachers' marking and what teachers expect from pupils by the end of lessons.
- Ways used by leaders to check the quality of teaching do not always focus sharply enough on how well pupils are learning.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 11 lessons, of which four were observed jointly with the headteacher. Inspectors also observed some teaching of groups of pupils, and an assembly. Nine members of staff were seen teaching.
- Inspectors looked at samples of work from all age groups, some of which was sampled with the acting headteacher. Inspectors spoke to pupils about their work during lessons and listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors held meetings with pupils, members of the governing body, leaders and staff. A meeting was also held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 64 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and talked to parents during the inspection. Account was also taken of written responses submitted by parents. Inspectors analysed responses from the 28 questionnaires completed by school staff.
- Inspectors observed the school's work, looked at progress and attendance information, improvement plans, evidence of the monitoring of teaching, and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Vivienne McTiffen, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Peter Strauss

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported by school action is above average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for whom the school receives additional income (the pupil premium) is well below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has experienced staff and leadership changes. The headteacher has been absent since January 2014 due to ill health. The deputy headteacher left at the end of the spring term 2014. Their posts are currently filled by an executive acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher from a local primary school.
- Privately-run before and after-school care facilities use some of the school's accommodation. As these facilities are not managed by the school's governing body, they are subject to separate inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement further by making sure that:
 - all teachers help pupils to understand how to improve when they mark their work
 - teachers consistently indicate to pupils of various abilities what they should achieve by the end of lessons
 - all pupils are given appropriate opportunities to write at length.
- Strengthen leadership and management by making sure that, when they check on the quality of teaching, leaders focus sufficiently on pupils' progress and how well they are learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children start in the Nursery and Reception class with abilities that are higher than those expected for their age. They are keen to learn and take an interest in a range of activities. They make good progress in developing basic literacy and numeracy skills and are well prepared for their learning in Year 1. By the time they leave the Reception class, standards are above those typically expected for their age.
- By the end of Year 2, standards are above average. Although attainment in writing remains slightly lower than in reading and mathematics, standards are on an upward trend. In the 2013 assessments, boys did not do as well as girls in writing. The school's information shows that gaps are closing and boys are now doing much better because teachers give them subjects to write about which they find interesting. Pupils' work seen during the inspection showed descriptive and imaginative writing inspired by popular stories; for example, *The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch*, and a topic on the Romans.
- In 2013, test results show that pupils, including the more able, make above-average progress to reach standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are well above average by the end of Year 6. Work in books and the school's information shows that, since the previous inspection, rates of progress have improved and pupils now make good progress in all classes.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. Leaders have strengthened links with outside agencies and parents to ensure that pupils get the right level of support. This has had a positive effect on raising pupils' confidence in their own abilities and their achievement.
- The school's information shows there is a marked improvement in the achievement of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium funding. Eligible pupils now make the same good progress as their classmates. Leaders match additional support precisely to individual pupils' specific learning needs, allowing pupils to excel academically and personally. Because of the small numbers of eligible pupils in each year group, it is not possible to comment on these pupils' relative attainment in 2013 without risk of identifying individual pupils.
- Pupils develop good speaking, listening and thinking skills. They enjoy discussing ideas with each other and finding out for themselves. For examples, during the inspection, pupils in Year 6 used a range of skills when being 'Super Sleuths' to glean information from a given text. They used reference books and atlases and explained clearly why they reached their conclusions.

The quality of teaching is good

- Staff get on well with their pupils and make the most of their positive attitudes to learning. They expect pupils to contribute and express their opinions and ideas. They make sure that tasks are interesting, and they share their humour and enthusiasm, creating a positive and encouraging climate for learning.
- Teachers link subjects together well, enabling pupils to use their skills for a range of purposes. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Year 3 were set the task of baking biscuits linked to their learning about the Second World War. The teacher expected pupils to use the correct mathematical vocabulary, calculate quantities and weigh accurately. The pupils made good progress in using mathematical skills and learning about rationing.

- Teachers plan lessons that help pupils to build on what they have previously learnt. They ask the right questions to check that pupils understand and they correct misconceptions during lessons. They give pupils the opportunity to discuss their work, especially before writing, and often challenge pupils, especially the more able, to think harder.
- In the Nursery and the Reception class, a range of exciting tasks, indoors and outside, stimulate children's curiosity and imagination and promote learning well. Staff keep regular checks on how well children are doing and gather evidence of progress in well-maintained 'Learning Journals' which are shared with parents.
- Learning support assistants are fully involved during lessons. They work closely with pupils of all abilities, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, to help them to succeed. They offer a good level of support to those who find it difficult to behave well and help them to conform to the school's expectations.
- Teachers give pupils tasks that are generally well matched to the range of ability in the class. However, not all teachers clearly indicate what pupils of various abilities should achieve by the end of lessons because expected outcomes are too general. Marking in pupils' books does not always help pupils to understand what they need to do next to improve.
- Staff teach phonics (linking letters and the sounds they make) and spelling, grammar and punctuation regularly. They remind pupils frequently to use these skills, leading to well-formed writing. However, sometimes, pupils do not write enough as there is some variation between classes in how often pupils have the opportunity to write at length.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. This contributes strongly to the progress pupils make in lessons and the smooth daily running of the school. On occasions – for example, during assembly – pupils' levels of attention are exemplary.
- Pupils respond well to all adults and maintain the same good level of behaviour during playtimes and lunchtimes. The school's records show that those who find it difficult to behave well make marked improvement over time.
- Pupils are attentive and enquiring. They work well together and value each other's contributions. They say that the work is pitched just right for their abilities and they recognise how staff help them to improve. Pupils know what levels they are working at in reading, writing and mathematics, and they strive to do well.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Leaders insist upon a consistent approach to the management of behaviour and make sure that pupils receive guidance on how to keep themselves safe. As a result, pupils know about different forms of bullying, including when using computers, and what to do if any issues arise. The school's records show that incidents are rare but any that do occur are followed up quickly. Pupils say they know who to talk to if they have a problem. The recent introduction of the 'worry box' is well received by pupils, and concerns are followed up by staff.
- From the time they start school, children are expected to take on responsibilities to help their teachers and each other. As they move through the school, pupils become involved in a wider range of roles, including making decisions on the school council. They participate in various school groups and help to tend the school garden.

- Pupils say they are happy at school, a view strongly supported by parents spoken to during the inspection. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about the range of activities. They participate confidently in performances. They say they enjoy playing brass instruments and taking part in regular sports and swimming activities. They show an interest in learning about people from backgrounds and faiths different to their own.
- Attendance is consistently above average. The school is successfully improving the attendance of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding and reducing the amount of absence due to holidays taken during term time.

The leadership and management are good

- The acting headteacher has built upon previous improvements and rapidly identified further priorities. She, together with the acting deputy headteacher, has quickly tackled weaknesses and established a consistent approach to teaching. Both leaders successfully transmit the school's aims to all, reflected in the very positive response to the questionnaires completed by staff.
- The work of all staff is checked regularly. Clear targets are set to help them to improve and are well matched to the needs of the school. Leaders make sure that staff are given appropriate training. The acting headteacher makes good use of the partnership primary school for staff to share expertise and develop their teaching skills further.
- Due to staff changes, some subject leaders are relatively new to their roles but they receive good support and training to help them to do their jobs well. Leaders make sure that teachers' assessments of how well pupils are doing are accurate and they seek external advice to confirm their judgements.
- Leaders analyse progress information to check how well pupils are doing and give additional help to those who need it. However, when leaders observe lessons, they do not always focus sufficiently on how well pupils are learning and the progress they are making in the lesson.
- The effect of the pupil premium spending is closely monitored to make sure that the support provided raises pupils' personal and academic achievement. Leaders are committed to equality of opportunity and discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- Leaders make sure that interesting activities promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well. Trips, visitors and good links with the local church enhance pupils' experiences and enjoyment. The primary school sports funding is used to develop staff expertise in the teaching of gymnastics and to widen pupils' participation in a range of sports activities, including swimming. As a result, the skills of pupils and staff are improving.
- Conversations with parents indicate they recognise and value the improvements made by leaders. They praise the good levels of communication and the caring ethos of the school. One parent commented, 'St. Mary's is a brilliant school with fantastic staff who really care about the children.' Leaders keep parents informed about their children's learning. They ensure that there are good arrangements for helping children to settle in when they start school in the Nursery and the Reception class.
- The local authority has provided a significant level of support and challenge in helping the school to improve through regular visits and review of its work.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Since the previous inspection, the governing body has undergone a review of its work in order to strengthen its systems and evaluate how well it is doing. As a result, there is now a structured approach to checking the work of the school. Governors have developed their roles well and more rigorously hold the school to account. They visit the school regularly and focus on its priorities for improvement. They recognise the school's strengths and what it needs to do to improve further. Governors value the support they receive from the diocese and the local authority. They undergo local authority training to hone their skills and are keen to make the most of the expertise within their ranks. Governors are well informed about the quality of teaching and how good teaching relates to good achievement. They have established that teachers' pay should be linked to the progress pupils make. They check how well pupils are doing and monitor the impact of the pupil premium and sports premium spending. The governing body makes sure 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	117447
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	442024

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	229
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann Sykes
Headteacher	Helen Gill
Date of previous school inspection	13 February 2013
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