

St Mary's CofE (C) First School

Marston Road, Wheaton Aston, Stafford, ST19 9PQ

Inspection dates

23–24 September 2014

| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Good | 2 |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| | This inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Leadership and management | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Quality of teaching | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Early years provision | | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Teaching requires improvement because it has not been good enough over time to ensure all pupils achieve well. This means that some of the most able do not always achieve as much as they could.
- Teachers' expectations are sometimes too low for pupils capable of harder work, or too high for pupils who need further practice so that they can move on successfully. On occasions, this leads to idle chatter and inappropriate behaviour by a minority in some lessons.
- Pupils' books show that they have not done enough extended writing to practise their writing skills well. Boys' writing is a particular issue.
- Books also show that mathematics skills are not promoted well enough in different subjects.
- Leadership and management require improvement because the skills of the people in the school, who are responsible for different subjects, are underdeveloped.
- The way the school measures its progress towards its stated priorities is not related precisely enough to raising pupils' achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- The executive headteacher manages teachers' performance well. He has made good use of the federation and other external support to improve teaching and learning, which had declined after the previous inspection.
- The governing body, set up after the federation, knows the school well. It challenged the school to improve and has supported the headteacher well in the drive to reverse the downward trend in attainment.
- Astute staff appointments have successfully minimised the impact of the many staff changes on pupils' progress, which is now improving.
- Staff are receptive to advice and willing to improve. They have made good use of training opportunities in school and across the federation, to help them.
- As a result of good teaching, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making good progress.
- Pupils enjoy school. They feel safe and know how to keep themselves safe. They make good use of the many resources that encourage them to be active at play and lunchtime.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited six lessons and sampled a further four, two with the headteacher, as part of a learning walk.
- Observations also took place of play and lunchtimes, and discussions were held with pupils, governors, staff and a representative of the local authority.
- The 10 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) were considered. The inspector also gathered the views of a sample of parents as they brought their children to school.
- Only 2 responses were received from staff but they, and comments from the staff, were also considered.
- A wide range of documents was examined, including information about pupils' progress and attendance, the school development plan, the school's self-evaluation document and records and policies about safeguarding and the quality of teaching.
- The inspector examined the work in pupils' current books, and a sample of books from last year. She also sampled sessions where pupils were learning phonics (the sounds that letters make), visited guided reading sessions, and heard pupils read.

Inspection team

Doris Bell, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school. Virtually all pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs on the school roll is higher than found in most schools.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is well below average. This funding is for pupils in local authority care and/or those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- As this is a first school, there are no government floor standards setting the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- There have been a number of staff and other changes for this small school to deal with since the previous inspection.
- The school became part of a federation with Brewood Church of England (Controlled) Middle School in 2011 with whom it now shares an executive headteacher and a governing body, which was constituted at the time of the federation.
- The number on roll has increased. This has resulted in a number of pupils joining different year groups and consequently changing their make-up.
- In September 2013, governors took over the previously privately-run Nursery on the school site.
- The school also belongs to a collaboration of schools that include a local high school and several other first schools. It has its own breakfast and after-school clubs.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make the quality of teaching good throughout the school by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and setting more challenging targets for pupils in writing and mathematics
 - improving boys' writing, and giving pupils more opportunities to write at length and to use their writing and mathematical skills in different subjects
 - ensuring that work is always at the right level for all pupils, from the least to the most-able
 - improve pupils' attitudes to learning so that they do not chat or behave inappropriately while they wait for others or for the teacher.
- Improve the impact of leadership and management on teaching and learning by:
 - making better use of the work done with subject leaders from the federated school to give leaders and managers in this school the skills they need to fulfil their responsibilities well
 - ensuring that all action planning has clear, measurable outcomes that link directly to pupils' progress.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The school's action planning focuses more on improving provision than in setting targets for the impact on pupils' progress. Also, targets set for different year groups generally aim at expected rather than good progress. As a result, expectations of staff and pupils are not always high enough, especially of the most able.
- Staff ability to lead and manage different subjects has been adversely affected by the many staff changes and the influx of pupils new to the school in different year groups. Support from the federated school has helped to minimise the impact of some of this, but staff in this school, all of whom have multi-responsibilities, are not yet fulfilling their roles in checking teaching and pupils' learning well enough to secure the pupils' best possible progress at all times.
- Despite the reported weaknesses, work with the federated school has had a noticeable impact on improvement. Because the two schools now work very closely together, and a newly appointed senior leader for St Mary's is set to take up post in January 2015, there is every indication that the school will continue to improve. For example, the gap in results between those supported by the pupil premium funding and the rest of the pupils is reducing, and more pupils reached the higher levels in Year 2 and Year 4 than has been the case in the past.
- The curriculum requires improvement to ensure that there are more opportunities for pupils to undertake longer pieces of writing, and to use their writing and mathematical skills in different subjects. However, a good start has been made on implementing the new curriculum and, with the federation and other schools, trying to secure continuous learning for the pupils from one phase of education to another.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is given due attention in different subjects. Pupils are successfully taught to be reflective and caring, to accept each other's differences, to begin to understand different faiths and cultures, and to take their place in a democratic society. They are also taught the importance of avoiding stereotypes and discrimination of any sort, including derogatory language.
- The management of teachers' performance has helped to improve teaching and learning through regular, rigorous monitoring followed by staff meetings and individual support to help teachers improve their practices. The objectives set for staff are closely allied to priorities in the school improvement plan. Staff understand the links and are receptive to the advice and support given to help them meet their objectives.
- The increase in the proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs has been managed well. A good start has been made on implementing the new statutory regulations. Leadership is shared across the two federated schools and aids continuity for the pupils when it is time for them to move on.
- The local authority, at the request of the headteacher and governors, provided an appropriately high level of support to help the school get back on track after the decline. The school has used that support, along with support from the federated school and external consultants, well. As a result, teaching and learning are once again improving. One area that bears testimony to the success is the improved provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Safeguarding procedures, including those for child protection, meet the government's current requirements and all training is up to date. The school rigorously checks that all staff, coaches and volunteers are suitable persons to work with children.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know the school well. They are very clear about its past decline, and about where they want it to be. They also know, although there have been many improvements, it is not there yet. Governors

are appropriately involved in school development planning and self-evaluation. The governors understand what data is telling them about pupils' progress, and check what the school is doing to improve it. Governors attend training to help them fulfil their roles, and gain information at first hand by meeting with staff and pupils, and examining pupils' books, to check the impact of their decisions. They also check that pupil premium funding is helping disadvantaged pupils to catch up with their peers, and they have made sensible decisions about how to use sports premium funding to extend sporting and exercise opportunities for the pupils.

- The governing body ensures that reviews of the performance of teaching and support staff are carried out and that pay awards are linked to it. They have supported the headteacher well in managing underperformance, and have made wise decisions about staffing and staff recruitment to get the best for the school. This has ensured, for example, that provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has continued to improve despite staff absence in the past year.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of some pupils requires improvement. This is because, in a small number of lessons, there is some low level disruption that affects their learning. Pupils recognise this, commenting, for example, that they preferred mathematics lessons to English lessons because they were able to work quietly.
- Some pupils said English lessons were 'too noisy sometimes' and admitted that they sometimes messed about, or chatted socially instead of about their work, acknowledging that doing so affects their learning. Nevertheless, all pupils spoken to said they understand and appreciate the range of rewards and sanctions in place to encourage good behaviour, and do not like if they have to lose 'golden time'.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school, and at play and lunchtimes, is orderly. Pupils very much appreciate the coaching that takes place at lunchtime, and all the new equipment that enables them to keep active. They were eager to show how they used the equipment, and talked about the importance of keeping fit and healthy.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils understand the importance of staying safe when using, for example, computers, the internet, mobile phones and social networking sites. They are also taught the importance of considering whether a risk is safe to take or not.
- Pupils understand the different forms bullying can take and the difference between bullying and falling out occasionally. They acknowledge bullying happens but say it is 'very rare'. When asked who they might turn to if they felt unsafe or had any concerns, they were all adamant it would be the teachers because they knew they would always get help from them. The school's annual 'Well-being Week' tackles issues such as bullying, playing games fairly and helping others.
- Attendance is above average, pupils enjoy school and they want to learn. They readily work together and talked about everyone being equally important, regardless of race, culture or background. The school has its own breakfast and after-school clubs that provide a good start and end to the day for the pupils who attend them.
- Parents are largely very positive about behaviour and safety and are pleased with the school and what it does for their children. Most spoke well of the recent improvements.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it still does not consistently get the best from the pupils. This is because, although pupils' work is usually planned at three different levels, there is not always enough difference between the levels to stretch the most-able and support the least-able.
- In lessons, pupils sometimes finish work very quickly and have to wait because they do not know what to move onto next, or struggle with the work given because they do not have the skills or understanding needed to succeed. In both cases, this leads to their 'switching off' and sometimes talking noisily or

moving about too much.

- Teachers are making better use of what pupils already know as they plan new work. They just do not do so consistently well at all times. Despite this, some good practice is evident, particularly in mathematics, where staff made very clear to the pupils why they were re-visiting particular aspects of learning so they had the skills needed to tackle new, harder work.
- The teaching of reading and writing, including phonics, as well as of mathematics, is improving following support and guidance through the federation. An advantage in this small school is that training can be implemented very quickly. Therefore, because staff willingly accept advice, they put things into practice quickly, with good effect. They also work together well and support each other.
- Teaching assistants work closely with teachers to support disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs to make at least expected progress. These pupils are helped to participate fully in all parts of a lesson or, where relevant, in smaller groups or on their own to develop particular aspects of their learning.
- Teacher's marking supports and challenges pupils to help them learn more. Pupils are given time to respond to marking comments. They talk enthusiastically about doing so and can see how it helps them improve faster.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Standards have risen to broadly average overall in Year 2 in 2014, and in reading and mathematics, but they are still below average in writing. The improvement came after a decline to 2013, as numbers grew and the school took in some new pupils, some of whom had made less progress elsewhere. In Year 4, standards are broadly at the levels expected for pupils' ages, although they, too, reflect an improvement on the previous year when progress was not as good.
- Examination of current and past pupils' work show that the improvements are gathering pace in all year groups, in reading, writing and mathematics as staff respond to training and guidance, particularly in the use of assessment information to plan new work. For example, the higher outcomes in Reception in 2014 are being built on well in Year 1, and the use of additional staff in Year 4 is speeding up learning in that age group and so their progress is at least in line with what is expected. This all bodes well for the future.
- The drop in overall attainment in Year 2 in 2012 was halted in 2013, when improvement took place in reading, though not in writing and mathematics. In 2014, that improvement continued with attainment rising overall, including reading, writing and mathematics. Similar improvement is evident in Year 4, showing that pupils are now making better progress than in the past.
- Account is now being taken of the needs of the most able pupils. Although their achievement still requires improvement, more are now working at the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics, and are beginning to make the faster progress of which they are capable. For example, although the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics is lower than is found nationally, it is higher than 2013, when no pupil reached that level.
- The additional support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, enable these pupils, too, to make at least expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Staff ensure that, for these pupils, learning is broken down into the smaller steps they need to take to succeed.
- Disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium also make expected progress. Overall, their attainment is just over a term behind other pupils in reading, writing and mathematics, and therefore similar to the national gap. However, the gaps are beginning to close, although they are doing so faster in some year groups than in others.
- The results of the phonics checks for pupils in Year 1 rose to above average this year. When pupils read, they use their phonics skills well to help them read new words. Staff are careful to ensure that sounds are

enunciated correctly, and pupils were observed putting the sounds together confidently and accurately. They are also developing good comprehension skills, assisted by effective adult questioning.

- The increased focus on teaching grammar, punctuation and spelling is improving the quality of pupils' writing. There are some examples also of pupils using these skills in longer pieces of writing and in different subjects but they do not do so often enough.
- Boys, particularly, are reluctant writers. They often write no more than a few sentences or leave their writing unfinished. The school has started to take measures to improve writing overall and especially for boys. While most pupils present their work well, some boys' books tend to be scruffy and their writing hard to read.
- Pupils enjoy, and participate enthusiastically in the wider range of sport and physical education activities now available to them through the sports funding. They recognise that these activities improve their overall physical fitness and enjoy the team sports within the school. As yet, they do not have the opportunity to engage in competitive sports with other schools.

The early years provision

is good

- Despite the fluctuating numbers, children almost always start Reception with the knowledge, skills and understanding that are typical for their age. Good teaching ensures they make good progress and are well-prepared for their work in Year 1. In 2014, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development was above the national average in a year group that was larger than usual for the school.
- The Nursery has been incorporated into the school well. Nursery and Reception staff have successfully established common systems for tracking and recording children's progress, and checking the accuracy of their assessments. This has enabled smooth transition from one class to the next. Children joining Reception from other settings also receive good support and all children settle quickly into the well-established routines.
- Staff have used advice and guidance from the local authority effectively to improve the learning environment and ensure that all activities, indoors and out, have a clear learning purpose. Staff are vigilant in recording what children say and do as they learn, and using it to plan the next steps for each child. Occasionally, however, learning is missed because they have not interacted sufficiently with children who choose to work on their own.
- Children who need additional support, for whatever reason, are picked up quickly. Staff consult well with parents so that personal and learning needs can be addressed as early as possible. They also note the most able children and extend their learning accordingly. These children sometimes have the opportunity to work alongside pupils in Year 1.
- Children's 'learning journeys' provide a good record of progress. Work is dated and annotated to show the degree of support and some good progress is evident, particularly in writing. The school has rightly focused on improving writing from the earliest age and learning journeys from last year show much improvement from simple mark making at the start of Reception to writing in sentences and sometimes beginning to join sentences in a logical way to tell a story.
- Children's safety and their physical and emotional well-being are promoted well. Children work and play in a safe and secure learning environment. They behave well and they are eager to learn. The activities on offer stimulate their curiosity and make them want to find out more. Staff work hard to make best use of the small outdoor areas but what goes on in them is limited by their size.
- Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Current staff, covering for maternity leave, work together well. They are continuing the improvements started over a year ago when leadership changed and new systems were introduced. The school has used local authority support well to ensure that children's knowledge and skills improve.

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 | 124284 |
| Local authority | Staffordshire |
| Inspection number | 448177 |

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

| | |
|--|---|
| Type of school | First |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 3–9 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 95 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Doreen Ellis |
| Headteacher (Executive) | David Swift |
| Date of previous school inspection | 29 June 2010 |
| Telephone number | 01785 840314 |
| Fax number | 01785 840314 |
| Email address | admin@st-marys-wheatonaston.staffs.sch.uk |

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2014

