

St Nicolas CofE VA Primary School

Locks Hill, Portslade, BN41 2LA

Inspection dates 15–16 July 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Pupils are not making enough progress to enable them to reach at least average standards by the end of Year 6, particularly in writing.
- The skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar are not systematically taught across the school.
- Progress is inconsistent between year groups and slower during Year 3 than in other years. This deficiency has not yet been fully addressed and as a consequence, pupils do not achieve well by the end of Year 6.
- Teachers' marking does not always help pupils to know how to improve their work. Not all teachers check to make sure that pupils act on the advice they have been given.
- The tasks teachers set for pupils do not always challenge them to think hard. The most able pupils in particular are not always set difficult enough work to do.
- In writing, not all pupils develop the skills to produce writing of a high enough standard.

The school has the following strengths:

- School leaders' checks on teaching, including teachers' marking, and on pupils' progress are bringing improvements, particularly for pupils in Years 4 to 6.
- The recently introduced Early Years Foundation Stage, where provision and teaching are good, provides children with a positive start to school life.
- The values and Christian ethos of the school are shared by the whole school community and promote pupils' good behaviour and attitudes to learning. Pupils have a good awareness of how to keep themselves safe.
- The governing body has been restructured since the previous inspection. Governors have undertaken extensive training and are now able to offer an increasingly effective level of challenge and support to the school's leaders.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons of which three were jointly observed with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- Groups of pupils from Year 3 and Year 6 were heard reading. Work in pupils' books was examined in detail.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other leaders within the school, a group of governors, a selection of pupils and two representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 109 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, informal discussions with parents before school and 10 letters from parents and carers. The lead inspector met with one parent at the parent's request. The 22 responses to the staff questionnaire were also analysed.
- The inspection team looked at a range of documents provided by the school. These included details of the progress pupils currently make, the school's improvement plans and its evaluation of its work, as well as information relating to the attendance and safeguarding of pupils.

Inspection team

Jill Thewlis, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Roger Fenwick

Additional Inspector

Lucy Nutt

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a larger than average-sized primary school.
- A large building programme has been recently completed to enable the school to become a primary school. In September 2013, two classes of reception-age children were admitted.
- In September 2015, the school will have a full complement of primary-age pupils.
- The numbers of pupils who receive support from the pupil premium, which is additional funding provided by the government for those eligible for free school meals, those who are looked after or those from a service family, is above the national average.
- The proportions of pupils with special educational needs and who are supported at school action is below the national average. The numbers of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or who receive support at school action plus are above the national average.
- The school meets the current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the standards of teaching and accelerate progress, particularly but not exclusively in Year 3, so pupils' achievement is at least in line with the national averages by:
 - making sure that the work teachers set for all pupils which matches their abilities and challenges their thinking
 - ensuring that the most able pupils are set hard enough work to enable them to achieve the highest standards in all subjects
 - systematically teaching spelling, punctuation and grammar throughout the school so that pupils make more rapid progress in writing
 - ensuring that all pupils know how to improve their work and that teachers check that they act on the advice they receive.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement overall because pupils do not make good enough progress in writing. As a result, they do not reach national average standards in writing by the end of Year 6. Pupils' achievement is better in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils do not achieve as well in writing because they are not taught spelling, punctuation and grammar systematically and lack the necessary skills. The work seen in books shows variable progress. Pupils have many opportunities to write at length for different subjects. However, their lack of knowledge of spelling, punctuation and grammar sometimes slows their progress in writing.
- Rates of pupils' progress are variable. Pupils make slow progress in Year 3. In Years 4 to 6, progress of pupils currently in the school has improved in all subjects. This is because of more rigorous and effective checks on their achievement and on standards of teaching. Because of previously weaker teaching and slower progress, pupils' attainment has not yet improved sufficiently to show significant increases in standards at the end of Year 6.
- Test results in 2013 showed that pupils in Year 6 who are eligible for support from additional funding were 18 months behind their classmates in mathematics, 12 months behind in reading and writing. Since September 2013, the support for these pupils has been more effective. Consequently, the gap has narrowed and pupils who receive extra support are now making progress which is at least in line with their classmates.
- The most able pupils do not attain as highly as they should. Although their progress has substantially improved this year, when the work they are given is not hard enough they do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Most pupils with special educational needs achieve well because there is a wide range of support provided. However, this is not consistent across the school. For example, pupils with special educational needs in Year 3 are not making enough progress. The school opened two new Reception classes this year. Pupils enter with skills and abilities below those typical for their age. They make good progress because activities are well chosen. Most children will enter Year 1 with a good level of development.
- Pupils enjoy reading and benefit from a new, well-stocked library, and this has encouraged better progress. The most able pupils read confidently. Less able readers do not always use phonics knowledge (the link between letters and the sounds they make) to read difficult words effectively.
- Pupils are able to use their numeracy skills well in a variety of mathematical activities. For example, in Year 4, pupils enjoyed mathematical problem solving tasks that linked with other subjects and challenged their thinking.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is not yet ensuring all pupils make good enough progress in English and mathematics, especially those in Year 3.
- The teaching of writing is not leading to rapid enough progress, or giving pupils a thorough knowledge of grammar, punctuation and spelling to enable them to achieve highly.
- Some pupils in Years 3 to 6 are not able to apply their knowledge of letters and sounds (phonics) to help them become fluent readers. There is not enough emphasis on helping pupils to read expressively.
- In some cases teachers give all pupils the same tasks in mathematics, regardless of their ability. This slows pupils' progress, especially the most able. Presentation in books is sometimes untidy.
- The checking of pupils' progress has improved as a result of more careful monitoring by subject leaders, particularly in English and mathematics. Teachers' marking and feedback in some classes are good. This good practice is not, however, consistent across the school. Some

teachers do not give clear advice to pupils about how to improve their work. When teachers do not make sure that pupils act on their advice their progress is not as rapid as it could be.

- Most teachers question pupils well to help them deepen their understanding. However, this is not the case throughout the school. Questioning by some teaching assistants does not enable pupils to apply their thinking skills because pupils are provided with the answers too quickly.
- Children in the Reception class are enthusiastic about their learning because teaching is effective. Activities are well matched to the interests and abilities of the children. One child, applying paint with a roller, commented with glee, 'Look what happens when you press hard!' Other children were fascinated to see raisins bouncing up and down in carbonated water, saying, 'It's because they have air!'
- The teaching of phonics in the Reception class is good. Parents were highly positive about their children's learning in the Reception classes. They valued the good communication between the school and parents.
- There is a wide range of support provided for pupils with special educational needs. Teaching assistants have received extensive training in a range of support programmes. However, resources are not used consistently enough throughout the school to support and engage pupils in learning.
- Pupils who benefit from additional funding are now making similar progress to that of their classmates because they are well supported by teaching assistants either in the class or in small groups.
- Relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and pupils are warm. This helps to promote a positive climate for learning within the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are keen to learn and to do well. Lessons begin promptly because pupils are on time and are ready for learning. High standards of behaviour are expected and pupils respect this.
- Pupils say that behaviour has improved. The school's records support this view. There have been consistent improvements in behaviour since the previous inspection. Pupils are confident that any poor behaviour from a minority of pupils is dealt with promptly and effectively.
- Pupils are courteous at all times. They are friendly and confident. Behaviour around the school, in the dining hall and in the outside spaces is good. A wide range of physical activities at playtime and lunchtime ensures pupils are active. They return to the classroom with positive attitudes.
- Pupils are proud of their school and enjoy lessons. This view is wholly endorsed by their parents and carers.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. All safeguarding requirements are fully met. Risk assessments are carried out effectively and numerous members of staff are qualified first aiders. Attendance is improving and is at average levels. The school makes determined efforts to reduce absence.
- Pupils say that bullying does not cause them anxiety. When it occasionally occurs it is dealt with quickly. Pupils are aware of cyber bullying and how to combat it. They have developed a good understanding of equality through exploring issues about homophobic bullying. Pupils and their parents and carers are confident that pupils are safe and well cared for in school. Parents and carers talk about the 'exceptional care' provided by the school. The pupils respond well to the positive ethos of care and support within the school community.

The leadership and management require improvement

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have taken effective action to reduce weak teaching and to accelerate the pupils' progress. Recent appointments have strengthened the standard of teaching within the school. However, these improvements have yet to fully compensate for the impact of previous weak teaching on outcomes for pupils.
- Staff who are responsible for the leadership of individual subjects check increasingly well on the progress of pupils in their subject. The new leader of mathematics is effective in raising the rates of progress and key stage test results. The leadership of literacy is less effective. For example, attainment in writing in end of key stage tests has not improved since 2013.
- There are suitable improvement plans with quantifiable measures and time scales for checking progress. These are proving effective in improving teaching and pupils' achievement. Leaders are developing accurate procedures to measure the school's performance, and know the strengths and remaining areas for improvement, particularly in relation to the progress of pupils in Year 3.
- Leaders hold teachers to account for the progress of the pupils in their class more rigorously now than in the past. As a result, pupils are making faster progress. The improvement in teaching has been supported by effective training opportunities for teachers and other staff. The school has benefited from extensive and effective support from the local authority. This support has helped the school to improve the overall standard of teaching.
- The additional government funding to promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles is well used. In conversations with inspectors, pupils enthused about the range of sport available to them. They have good opportunities to engage in physical activity at lunchtimes. The school has bought equipment to promote activity, including a climbing wall. Pupils are also able to take part in a wider range of competitions such as cross-country, tag rugby and athletics. Targeted training for staff has been provided to help pupils reach high standards.
- There are wide ranging opportunities to develop the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. There are strong links with the church and pupils have many opportunities for reflection. There is a strong team ethic within the whole school community. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. They value the caring ethos.
- Pupils and adults work cooperatively together. Pupils know what is right and wrong and that all actions have consequences. There are appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop cultural awareness through art, sport, drama and music. The performance of 'Bugsy Malone' was eagerly anticipated by staff and parents and carers. Pupils from all backgrounds and abilities are welcomed at the school, and all have equal opportunities to do well, with no discrimination.
- The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced. There are suitable plans for the delivery of the new national curriculum. Pupils say they like having subjects linked together because it helps them to learn better.
- Safeguarding arrangements meets statutory requirements.

■ The governance of the school:

- Since the previous inspection, governors have worked hard to address their areas for improvement. The governing body has been restructured and a skills audit undertaken. Governors are recruited according to the skills they can offer. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, including the quality of teaching. Governors have received wide-ranging training, including the use and analysis of school data. The link between good performance by teachers and how this is rewarded is clearly understood. Governors ensure that the finances of the school are secure. They ensure that the additional funding to promote the progress of eligible pupils and that which supports physical activity for the whole school is used effectively.

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	114560
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	450589

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Church of England voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	310
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Julie Scarrett
Headteacher	Andy Richbell
Date of previous school inspection	October 2012
Telephone number	01273 418026
Fax number	01273 430209
Email address	head@stnicolas.brighton-hove.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

