

St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School

Magdalen Road, St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN37 6EU

Inspection dates 26 –27 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Early years provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Pupils' achievement is too varied. Pupils do not always make good progress, particularly between Reception and the end of Year 4.
- Key groups of pupils, such as the more able, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils do not make consistently good progress. By the time they leave the school, they have not made as much progress as their peers.
- The quality of teaching is not consistently good. Teachers' expectations of pupils are sometimes too low and work does not challenge pupils sufficiently.
- Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage (the Reception class) is not yet good. Planning and provision do not link well enough to the assessments made about children.
- Senior leaders think the school is doing better than it is. Plans for improvement do not, therefore, focus precisely enough on what the school needs to do to ensure teaching and learning are consistently good.
- The role of foundation subject leaders is not developed well enough. These leaders do not have enough opportunities to improve teaching and learning in their subjects.
- Governors do not provide rigorous enough challenge to the school because their view of the school's performance is too generous.
- Pupil premium funding is not used effectively enough to ensure disadvantaged pupils catch up with their peers within the school.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Pupils show consistently high levels of commitment to their learning.
- Teaching in Years 5 and 6 is of a high standard. Pupils achieve well in these classes.
- By the time they reach the end of Key Stage 2, the majority of pupils have made very good progress from their starting points.
- The work the school does to keep pupils safe is outstanding. As a result, pupils conduct themselves very well and take good care of each other.
- The school's very effective promotion of global citizenship ensures pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- All staff are committed to the school. They develop excellent links with parents, who hold the school in high regard.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed the school’s work, including 15 lessons across all three key stages, two jointly with the headteacher. The inspectors observed playtimes and pupils’ behaviour around the school, as well as an assembly. They analysed pupils’ work and listened to some pupils read.
- Discussions were held between inspectors and the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, other members of the senior leadership team, members of staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, a foundation governor and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors talked with some parents and considered 69 responses about the school from parents through the online questionnaire (Parent View), as well as 17 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspection team evaluated a range of school documentation including the school’s development plan, the school’s own checks on its performance, information about pupils’ achievement, minutes of meetings and the school’s behaviour logs.

Inspection team

Matthew Barnes, Lead inspector

Seconded Inspector

Robin Hammerton

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School is a smaller-than-average-sized primary school. There are seven classes from Reception to Year 6.
- Half of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds, and around a third of pupils' first language is not, or is not believed to be, English.
- Just under a fifth of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care or known to be eligible for free school meals. This is below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is below the national average.
- In 2014, the school met the government's floor standard, which sets the minimum expectation for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, so it is consistently good, by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of pupils, especially in Years 1 to 4, so that teaching is consistently high across the school
 - ensuring work challenges all pupils well enough so that their progress is rapid
 - closing the gaps in achievement between different groups of pupils.
- Improve the provision and outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - making better use of assessment to match provision to the needs of all pupils
 - improving the accuracy of evaluations made by school leaders about the quality of provision so that rapid improvements can be made.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - making candid and accurate evaluations of the school's effectiveness
 - tightening plans for improvement so that the quality of teaching becomes consistently good
 - improving the use of the pupil premium funding so that it has more of an impact on the progress of disadvantaged pupils
 - developing the roles of subject leaders further by giving them more opportunities to improve teaching and learning, and evaluate pupils' achievement, in their areas of responsibility
 - ensuring governors challenge school leaders more effectively using accurate information about the school's performance.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management requires improvement

- School leaders are very passionate about the school, but they have been unable to step back and take an objective and accurate view of the school's effectiveness. This means their evaluations are too generous. They have not sufficiently noticed weaknesses in teaching and do not, therefore, identify precisely what is needed to improve the school. They rely too heavily on Key Stage 2 data when assessing the quality of the school's provision as a whole.
- As a result, school plans are not focused well enough on where the school has weaknesses. While school leaders work tirelessly for the school, the lack of precision in their evaluations means that plans are not always making the difference where they are most needed. More often, improvements are made in areas that are already strengths in the school.
- Checks on pupils' progress and observations of lessons carried out by the senior leaders provide teachers with feedback on their performance. However, the targets set for teachers to improve their performance are not always precise enough to improve the quality of their teaching, despite having clear expectations about what pupils should achieve. This is again linked to the precision of evaluations made on teaching which are not focused sharply enough.
- Subject leaders demonstrate strong subject knowledge and work hard on the areas of responsibility they have been given. They have not, however, been able to develop their roles to allow them to improve sufficiently the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects, deferring to the senior leadership team. They are not sure enough how well pupils achieve in their subjects.
- The school provides a rich range of learning experiences to develop pupils' understanding of their roles as global citizens. Links made to schools from across the world, as well as the work done to achieve accreditation as a Rights Respecting School, mean that pupils can explore and appreciate different faiths, cultures and perspectives. This, along with the strong Christian distinctiveness of the school, has ensured that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is well developed. Furthermore, the high profile of this work ensures that equality of opportunity is well promoted. Discrimination is not tolerated in any form. As a result, all members of the school community relate well to one another.
- There are a number of exciting elements to the school's curriculum which pupils say they particularly enjoy. Topics covered in classes engage the pupils well and the school's work on the 'power of reading' has supported the good work the school does in promoting pupils' enthusiasm for reading. At times, opportunities to deepen pupils' learning in other subjects are missed because the subjects are seen too much as a vehicle for writing rather than important in their own right.
- The use of the pupil premium funding needs improvement. This is because too often it has been used on initiatives that benefit all pupils rather than targeting the specific needs of eligible pupils. Decisions about how to use the funding are not based on analyses of eligible pupils' achievement.
- The school's use of the sport funding effectively supports the existing strong provision for physical education at the school. Teachers benefit from working alongside sports coaches to develop their practice. Attendance at sports clubs is high, and pupils appreciate the range of opportunities they are given.
- The local authority holds the school in high regard. Senior leaders, who include the teachers in Years 5 and 6 and the subject leaders for English and mathematics, work with other schools for moderation and school improvement purposes. For this reason, support from the local authority has been minimal. This has improved more recently with the re-introduction of a school improvement partner for the school. However, this has not yet helped the school in making accurate judgements about its provision as a whole.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well organised. Governors share senior leaders' passion and commitment to the school. However, they also believe the school is doing better than it actually is because the information they receive about the school's performance is not always fully accurate. Although they challenge school leaders, they are not always rigorous enough when checking the evidence they are reviewing. At times, therefore, they have been too easily convinced; for example, about how effective the school's use of pupil premium funding has been in accelerating the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
 - Governors have an overview of performance management in the school. They have rightly kept checks on how the school's processes reward good teaching. They have not always been able to provide robust enough challenge, however, to ensure rewards are based on accurate evaluations of performance, because leaders have an overgenerous view of how well some teachers are doing.
 - Governors have a strong overview of how the school works to keep pupils safe. They work well with leaders to ensure that all statutory safeguarding requirements are fully met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. In lessons, pupils show impeccable attitudes to their learning, even when work they are asked to do is too easy. In all year groups, they work independently and supportively together, without needing to be told or reminded. Pupils behave exceptionally well in and around the school, including on the playground and when eating together in the school hall.
- Behaviour logs kept by the school demonstrate that incidents of poor behaviour are very rare indeed. On the exceptional occasions when there have been difficulties, the school's actions have been appropriate and effective.
- Pupils and their parents rightly have highly positive views of how well the school manages behaviour. Pupils who are new to the school and who struggle with their behaviour settle into the school quickly.
- The school's work as a Rights Respecting School has promoted pupils' excellent contribution to the ethos of the school. Pupils from different ethnicities mix and play well together. Older pupils take their pastoral role towards younger children very seriously. For example, Year 6 pupils make sure they look after children from the Reception class during the lunch hour.
- Pupils are exceptionally polite and well mannered. Older pupils in the school show confidence in their interactions with adults. They represent the school incredibly well in the way they treat visitors and each other. Pupils willingly and confidently take real responsibility for aspects of school life and organisation. Very productive relationships between staff and pupils add to the very positive climate of togetherness at the school.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils say they feel very safe at school and this is supported by the very positive views of their parents. Pupils themselves contribute to the safe environment at the school in the manner in which they conduct themselves and in the way they look out for one another.
- Pupils show a very high level of understanding in how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet.
- Bullying is exceptionally rare. Pupils are aware of the different types of bullying, including cyber bullying. They have an excellent understanding of their rights and the rights of others, and so equality is very effectively promoted by pupils themselves because of the guidance they have received from staff. They put this into excellent practice.
- Attendance has significantly improved and is now above the national average.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- The quality of teaching across the school is variable and not yet consistently good. It requires improvement because in too many classes teachers' expectations of what pupils will achieve are too low. This means that work does not always sufficiently challenge pupils so they do not make as much progress as they could. This is particularly pronounced in Years 1 to 4.
- Teachers do not always make good use of the assessments they have made. This means that work given to pupils is not always challenging enough to help them make rapid progress. For example in a Key Stage 1 mathematics lesson, pupils were only expected to add or take away one from different numbers. The pupils in a number of lessons stated that they found the work they had been given too easy, but nonetheless worked very hard to complete it.
- Marking is not always as effective as it could be. Too often pupils do not get the time they need to make the improvements to their work that teachers have suggested.
- Pupils show very good attitudes to their learning. They are very keen to learn and enjoy the topics they are studying. When expectations are higher, such as in Years 5 and 6, pupils make exceptionally good progress. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson about fractions, the strong subject knowledge of the teacher and teaching assistant promoted very high levels of thinking and discussion between pupils. This helped pupils develop their mathematical knowledge independently as they challenged each other's thinking and they achieved exceptionally well.
- Pupils are often engaged in what they are doing. They are given the opportunity to reflect on what they are learning and time to plan and complete their work. Positive relationships add to the calm and industrious atmosphere in classes.
- Teaching assistants and other adults are skilled and support children in their learning well. Teachers plan

appropriately to make the most of other adults' skills.

- The school has strength in its teaching of reading. Pupils enjoy reading and use these skills well across their learning. The teaching of phonics (the link between letters and their sounds) is less well developed. Expectations of what pupils might achieve could be higher.
- The teaching of mathematics varies in its effectiveness. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 benefit from being taught in groups with pupils of similar abilities. This helps ensure that more-able pupils, in particular, are extended and make good progress. However, mathematics is taught less well in other year groups. Here, different groups of pupils do not do as well as they could because work is not always matched well enough to their needs.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils do not make as much progress as they could from the time they enter the school to the end of Year 4. This is because leaders do not always make sure that the expectations of pupils are as high as they need to be.
- The number of children leaving the Early Years Foundation Stage with a good level of development has improved and is in line with the national average. This demonstrates that children make reasonable progress during their time in Reception.
- By the time pupils finish Year 1, they do not achieve as well as they could in their phonic screening check. The number of pupils who achieved the expected level increased in 2014, although remained below the national average.
- By the time pupils finish Key Stage 1, their attainment is about average. In 2012, their attainment was significantly below average, as was the attainment in mathematics in 2014. This is because expectations in Key Stage 1 are too low and so pupils do not make as much progress as they could in Years 1 and 2.
- Pupils' achievement accelerates significantly in Years 5 and 6. This ensures that by the time pupils leave the school in Year 6 they are well prepared for the next stage of their education and have made at least expected progress during Key Stage 2.
- Work seen in pupils' books demonstrates that pupils make reasonable gains in literacy and numeracy skills across the school. The standard of their work in Years 5 and 6 is often high, but this is not often enough the case in other year groups. Pupils take pride in their work and it is well presented.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs do not make as much progress as other pupils during Key Stage 2. They work hard on the work they are given and achieve better when expectations are higher.
- More-able pupils do not achieve as well as other pupils in the school. They make reasonable progress across Key Stage 2 and so often reach the higher levels. However, their progress is often slower than that of other pupils in the school except in writing.
- In 2014, White British and Asian pupils made good progress during Key Stage 2. The progress made by pupils from other minority ethnic backgrounds was more varied. In lessons, pupils from all backgrounds generally do better where the work is sufficiently challenging, and less well in lessons where expectations are lower.
- The progress of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is slower than other pupils in the school. Compared to similar pupils in other schools, these pupils attained levels at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2014 that were over two terms ahead in mathematics, nearly four terms ahead in reading and just under a term ahead in writing. However, they are, on average, almost two terms behind their peers in the school in mathematics and a year behind in writing. Despite regular checks, the school does not analyse the progress of pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding with sufficient rigour or frequency.

The early years provision

requires improvement

- Provision in the early years is not as effective as it could be. Assessments of pupils are not used well enough to ensure that the outdoor and indoor environments meet the needs of children, or that lessons when children choose activities are effective enough.
- Activities led by adults are more effective and help children to make progress. For example, a whole class phonics session led by the teacher helped children to develop their reading skills well. More-able children were challenged effectively by the teaching assistant who, through the use of good questioning, helped them to read more difficult words.
- Lessons where children have more choice about what they do, however, are not planned with the same level of sharpness. The activities on offer to the children do not link well enough to what they have been

learning in class. Furthermore, the environment has not been tailored in response to assessments about the children. This means that learning in these sessions is not precise and other adults are much less clear about how to help the children make rapid progress.

- Some children come into the Reception class with some weaknesses in their communication and language skills, not least because a large proportion speaks English as their second language. Planning does not ensure that these children can develop their language skills as quickly as they could. However, children show good attitudes to their learning and are, therefore, sufficiently prepared to move into Year 1.
- Children show excellent levels of concentration. They stay focused on activities for long periods of time and make very positive contributions. Adults work hard to ensure that children are, and feel, safe. Children interact well with each other and enjoy playing together.
- There are good links between staff and parents. Parents complete 'wow stars' on which they can record the achievements that children make at home. These are celebrated and added to the children's learning journals, ensuring that staff have a picture of what children can do at home, as well as at school.
- The leadership and management of the early years require improvement because leaders think that children's achievement in the Reception class is better than it is. They have an over-generous view of the quality of learning. School leaders rightly see the benefit of adult-led activities to promote learning, but do not show sufficient knowledge about the Early Year Foundation Stage curriculum to understand how the provision as a whole can be improved.

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	114574
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	448775

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	228
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Phillipa Casares
Headteacher	Jane Smith
Date of previous school inspection	23–24 September 2009
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