

St Mark's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Stafford Road, Southampton, SO15 5TE

Inspection dates 7–8 July 2015

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

- Pupils do not make good progress over time because, until fairly recently, teachers did not have high enough expectations of them.
- Attainment in reading, writing and mathematics declined in previous years and is still below average. Fewer pupils exceed the levels expected for their age than in most other schools.
- In reading and mathematics, pupils do not confidently use their skills in new tasks or in solving problems and they require too much adult support.
- Not enough pupils are strong readers. Some with learning or language needs do not have sufficient opportunities to practise their reading skills.
- The gap in attainment between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils is not closing quickly enough in writing.
- The quality of teaching is not consistently good in all year groups. A few teachers have difficulty adhering to the school's guidance on teaching quality.
- Some teachers do not demonstrate or explain new learning clearly. They do not always take account of the levels at which different pupils, such as the lower attaining pupils, are working.
- A few parents do not ensure that their children attend school regularly.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher's very strong leadership has driven forward improvement rapidly over the past year. She is ably supported by other leaders. The school is well placed to improve further.
- Effective systems for checking and improving the school's work are successfully raising both teaching quality and pupils' achievement.
- Pupils' progress has accelerated considerably this year. Attainment is now rising and is better than in the previous three years.
- Pupils enjoy school, work hard and behave well. Relationships with other pupils are very good.
- Reception children get off to a good start. They achieve well, the majority reaching a good level of development. This is built on well in Year 1.
- The good curriculum and effective spiritual, moral, social and cultural development support pupils' personal and academic skills well.
- Rigorous and effective safeguarding arrangements ensure pupils are kept safe and free from harm. Those pupils most at risk are very well looked after.
- Governors hold leaders to account effectively. They are well informed about teaching quality and pupils' progress, and strongly support improvement work.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in 17 lessons or parts of lessons, of which seven were jointly observed with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made a number of other short visits to group or individual activities to help pupils who have fallen behind catch up.
- Inspectors listened to a small sample of pupils read, scrutinised a selection of pupils' recorded work and visited some extra-curricular activities and the breakfast club.
- Meetings were held with pupils, members of the governing body and staff, including senior and middle managers. A conversation was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the 29 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and considered the school's own parental questionnaire. They also spoke to a small number of parents bringing their children to school.
- Responses from the 28 staff questionnaires were analysed.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and scrutinised a number of documents, including the school's records on current pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. They looked at documents related to planning and monitoring and safeguarding.

Inspection team

Diane Wilkinson, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Sue Horsnell	Additional Inspector
Christopher Crouch	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Marks is a larger than average-sized primary school. It has increased in size since its previous inspection. There are now three classes in each of Reception, and Years 1 and 2. There are two classes in all other year groups. At the time of the inspection, all Reception children were attending full time.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is high when compared to the national average. A much larger proportion of pupils than is seen nationally speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium funding is above the national average. This funding is to provide extra support for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and to children who are looked after by the local authority.
- A much greater proportion of pupils than is seen nationally join the school after the start of the Reception Year or leave before the end of Year 6.
- There have been a considerable number of staff changes since the previous inspection. An interim headteacher led the school during the summer term of 2014. The current headteacher joined the school in September 2014.
- The school provides a breakfast club that was also inspected. It also provides 'Stay and Play' after-school care which is inspected separately.
- The school is a member of the Southampton Cooperative Learning Trust. This is a group of local schools and education providers that work together to help improve the quality of education and pupils' achievement in the city.
- The school receives support from the Portswood Teaching School Alliance.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good through ensuring that:
 - all staff follow the school's guidelines on how to promote good progress in lesson activities
 - staff explain new learning clearly, taking care to provide sufficient advice so that all groups of pupils, including the lower attainers, are able to make good progress in their learning
 - tasks are adapted throughout lessons in order to help all pupils do their best
 - more middle-attaining pupils on the cusp of exceeding the levels of attainment expected for their age are helped to do so.
- Increase pupils' progress and raise their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - building on the activities to help pupils use their reading and mathematics skills in different situations, such as solving problems, with little adult support
 - providing more opportunities for the younger lower attaining pupils and pupils who speak English as an additional language to develop their confidence in using phonics (the sounds letter patterns represent in words)
 - taking further steps to ensure that disadvantaged pupils close the gap in attainment with their peers in writing
 - extending the approaches for ensuring that all parents encourage their children to attend school regularly.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The governors and local authority acted quickly when it became apparent that weaknesses in the quality of education and pupils' progress were not being tackled swiftly. This was partly because of inaccurate assessment of pupils' progress. The appointment of an interim headteacher in April 2014 led to measures being quickly taken to halt the decline.
- The current headteacher's very strong leadership ensures that other senior leaders fulfil their roles well. Middle leaders, such as those overseeing subjects, now have the skills needed to play an effective role in supporting school improvement.
- There is a strong commitment among staff and governors to continue improving the quality of teaching and pupils' progress. Plans for improving the school are well targeted at weaknesses. Leaders regularly check the effectiveness of their strategies, swiftly adapting these when necessary.
- Systems for checking and improving teaching quality are very successful. Staff are set high performance targets based on ensuring pupils make rapid progress. Expectations are that all teaching will be at least good and will have a positive impact on pupils' progress.
- Initially using the expertise of the Portswood Primary Academy Trust teaching school, leaders have become skilled at analysing the effect of teaching on pupils' progress. Very effective monitoring and coaching have largely eradicated weak teaching. Improvement in the quality this year is impressive. During the inspection, the impact of teaching on pupils' progress was mainly good.
- Leaders are well aware that there is still some way to go to ensure that all teaching is consistently good. Additionally, too many pupils still have to make up the gaps in their learning caused by slow progress in the past. Current approaches are very well targeted at these areas. The school is well placed to improve further.
- The school is very strongly committed to providing quality of opportunity, fostering good relationships and discouraging discrimination. Pupils' personal development is a strength as a result. Staff are much better this year at meeting pupils' individual needs.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered well. British values, such as respect and tolerance, are especially well promoted. Pupils from the wide range of backgrounds, religions and cultures at St Mark's get on very well together as a result. A range of activities, such as those associated with the recent general election, help gain pupils' commitment to democracy and the rule of law. By means of these activities, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The well-designed curriculum engages pupils' interest and provides good advice for teachers on which to base lesson activities. This has been instrumental in helping to raise teachers' expectations of pupils.
- Leaders work closely with other schools in the Southampton Cooperative Learning Trust to help improve important aspects of learning such as the rigour and accuracy of assessment.
- The additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used to good effect, so that the gap in attainment with other pupils is now starting to narrow. It is allocated effectively to meet these pupils' academic and personal needs. Where expert teaching is provided, as observed during the inspection, it is highly effective.
- The primary sports grant is used successfully to improve teaching quality and increase pupils' participation in sports. A club for the youngest pupils that teaches them to play traditional games is extremely popular. Team sport activities also help pupils with behavioural difficulties learn to cooperate well with others.
- Safeguarding arrangements fully meet requirements. Policies and training are up to date. Staff pay rigorous attention to pupils' on-site safety. The family support worker and special educational needs coordinators provide a high level of care for the pupils most at risk. Pupils are very well looked after in the breakfast club.
- Parents are appreciative of the school, with many who speak English as an additional language commenting on the school's efforts to communicate with them. Most parents support the school's work well, but, despite the school's strenuous efforts, a few do not ensure that their children attend regularly.
- The local authority's high level of challenge and support helped the school to turn around its declining quality of education. Their officers' advice and training skills, together with those provided by leaders of the Portswood Primary Academy Trust, have helped bring about the rapid improvement over the last 12 months. In addition, this has greatly strengthened the capacity of St Mark's leaders, whom the local authority rightly deem to require much less support in the future.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors hold the school to account well. They ensure that evidence from the checks made on pupils'

progress and teaching quality are regular and accurate, and their skills at analysing this are secure.

- Governors benefit from very well analysed data on pupils' progress that they can easily understand. This ensures that they accurately compare St Mark's performance with that of other schools locally and nationally. Governors' aspirations are high and they ensure challenging targets are set for leaders to help achieve them.
- Through very well presented information on teaching quality and their own visits, governors have a clear understanding of how well this has improved, and where it needs to improve further. They are well aware how underperformance is tackled, valuing the strong mechanisms now in place to support weaker staff. Formal procedures for managing staff performance fully meet requirements. Governors also know how the school would reward good teaching, were this merited.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' positive attitudes in lessons support their learning well. They are friendly, polite and courteous.
- As the quality of teaching has improved, so has pupils' commitment to learning. The revised curriculum ensures they see the relevance of activities and so most pupils work hard.
- Occasionally when they have completed a task, pupils wait passively for the teacher to move them on rather than starting to tackle a new task themselves.
- The few pupils who find it difficult to behave well consistently are very well supported. As a result, lessons are very rarely affected by even low-level disruption.
- Relationships with adults and between pupils are very positive. Pupils respect each other's views. St Mark's is a happy and harmonious place to be, where pupils from a wide range of backgrounds get on very well together. In this aspect, they are especially well prepared for their secondary education and life in a diverse community.
- The rigorous systems in place to encourage good attendance have seen levels rising, although they remain below average. Where parents disregard the school's advice on the importance of good attendance, extra support is provided for the pupils affected to ensure they make up on what they have missed.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils feel safe and are well looked after in school.
- Parents are confident that their children are safe in school. Work with families that need extra support is especially good in ensuring that pupils who might be at risk are kept safe from harm.
- Pupils report that bullying does not happen often. They have strong confidence in all staff being able to prevent any re-occurring. Pupils are well aware that it is wrong to refer disparagingly to anyone's appearance, race or religion.
- Pupils respect the school's rules that keep them safe, taking good account of one another at play times or when playing sport.
- Pupils are well informed about hazards they might meet outside of school, for example when using social media sites on the internet. They know that this too is a place where bullying happens and are clear that they must tell an adult about any that does.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Over the previous few years, the quality of teaching declined. Teachers did not have high enough expectations of pupils and their progress slowed. Those pupils on the cusp of reaching the higher levels in national assessments were not helped to do so.
- Teachers did not check sufficiently that pupils had understood new learning. Consequently there were gaps in some pupils' skills and knowledge. The impact of teaching over time is not yet good.
- Strong coaching and advice ensure that the large majority of teaching is now good, although a few staff do not meet the expectations set out in the school's policy for good teaching. These teachers do not always explain new learning well enough, nor do they provide sufficient guidance, such as extra resources, for the lower attaining pupils to be able to get on without relying too much on adult support.

- Having to spend time going back to skills that should have been previously taught, staff have had far less time than they should to ensure pupils use their skills well in different situations. There is a mixed picture as a result. Not all pupils are good at using their mathematical competences in solving problems. However, effective opportunities for writing in a range of subjects such as science or history, which pupils greatly enjoy, ensure pupils are much more confident in using their writing skills in different ways.
- Lessons are well planned usually, with a well-thought-out range of activities to help pupils working at different levels make good progress. The strongest teachers adapt these regularly throughout the lesson, getting the best out of pupils. Other staff are less effective and this limits the extent of pupils' progress.
- Teachers manage pupils' behaviour in all lessons well, due to the mutual respect between adults and pupils.
- Teachers are skilled at questioning pupils to help their understanding. Pupils work well together, thoughtfully testing out ideas or checking their answers with their partners.
- The quality of marking throughout the school is very good. Pupils are clear as to how well they have done and how to improve their work. Any mistakes or errors are quickly followed up.
- Activities now challenge the higher-attaining pupils well and they make the progress they should. A few teachers still miss opportunities for helping some middle-attaining pupils exceed the levels expected for their age.
- Special activities to help pupils in danger of falling behind to catch up are accelerating their progress when taken out individually or in groups, although support in class is not always as good. There are insufficient opportunities for the younger lower-attaining pupils and those who speak English as an additional language to use their phonic skills in new situations.
- Extra reading and mathematics activities help disadvantaged pupils close the gap in attainment with their peers more quickly. Those for writing are less effective and do not always tackle disadvantaged pupils' needs sufficiently.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- After the last inspection, pupils' progress slowed and attainment in reading, writing and mathematics began to decline. This was not identified and addressed quickly enough so a legacy of underachievement still remains.
- In Years 2 to 6, there are still gaps in some pupils' skills and knowledge because there has been insufficient time to make these up. Therefore, progress over time is not good in all year groups.
- The higher-than-average proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school throughout the year makes it difficult to track progress between year groups. However, the school's effective assessment procedures show that progress has accelerated especially well since September 2014 in all year groups. No year group is underperforming. In Reception and Year 1, where there is no legacy of poor performance, pupils' achievement is good.
- Attainment is rising and is better than in the previous three years. The school now meets government floor standards in reading, writing and mathematics. This ensures that pupils are suitably prepared for secondary school. However, attainment in these subjects remains below average, largely because too few pupils reach the higher levels of attainment in national tests.
- In reading, some lower-attaining pupils and pupils who speak English as an additional language make slower progress than in other subjects. This limits the proportion of pupils reaching the levels expected for their age in reading. In writing and mathematics, pupils who speak English as an additional language make good progress and catch up well on their classmates.
- The quality of writing has improved considerably this year, both in the correct use of spelling, punctuation and grammar, and the way pupils use words successfully to describe or explain things. By Year 6, an increasing number of pupils write effectively in different formats such as persuasive letters, instructions or information, for example about rainforest animals.
- Pupils use their writing skills well in other subjects. For example, Year 6 pupils found some very interesting words to describe Henry VIII in a history activity. However, despite good progress this year, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in the Year 6 national writing assessments is much lower than in most schools.
- Attainment in mathematics has risen well this year and is closer to the national level than in reading and writing. The strong promotion of calculation skills ensures that pupils make up well for gaps in previous learning. They use their skills to good effect when working with measures or data. However, pupils are not as good at applying their skills in new tasks or in solving problems without adult help. This limits

attainment at the higher levels.

- Improved teaching ensures that the most able pupils now make the progress they should and consistently reach the higher attainment levels in national tests. Not enough is done to help some middle attainers reach the higher levels also.
- Very effective support this year has ensured that disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make the same improved progress as their classmates. However, their achievement is not good because of the slower progress made in the past.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils requires improvement, although they are now beginning to close the gap in attainment in reading and mathematics with other pupils in the school. This is due to the good support provided this year. In last year's national assessments for Year 6, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils was over a year behind that of other pupils nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. When compared with their classmates, their attainment in these subjects was two terms behind. This year, inspection evidence shows that pupils are now only a term and a half behind their classmates in reading and mathematics, but more than a year behind them in writing. There is no national comparison available for this year.

The early years provision

is good

- Children start Reception with skills below those typically seen at this age, although there is a very wide range of abilities. Children achieve well and the majority reach a good level of development. They are well prepared for the work in Year 1.
- Children are well taught through effectively planned activities which successfully meet the needs of individual children. These activities both motivate and challenge children to do their best.
- Important literacy and mathematics skills are well taught. Children have many opportunities to stimulate their imagination, for example through role play.
- The recently extended outdoor area is starting to be used effectively to support physical activities, but its use to support more academic learning is not fully developed yet.
- Children's well-being and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are fostered well. Children behave well, persevere with their tasks and form positive relationships with others.
- Adults take great care to ensure that children are well supervised, especially when moving between the indoor and outdoor areas. Children are taught to use tools and equipment safely.
- Each child has a 'Special Book', collating evidence on his or her progress. These are regularly viewed by parents who are invited to contribute. An electronic assessment programme effectively checks pupils' progress, allowing future activities to be adjusted well to meet their needs.
- The early years provision is well led and managed. There is good teamwork among the staff, who are keen to make further improvements to the quality of children's education. Effective procedures for when children begin school help staff build productive relationships with parents.

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	116342
Local authority	Southampton
Inspection number	456204

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	470
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Charlotte Walker
Headteacher	Stephanie Bryant
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 April 2012
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