

Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas CofE VA Primary School

Tollesbury Road, Tolleshunt D'Arcy, Maldon CM9 8UB

Inspection dates	13–14 January 2016
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The school has suffered a protracted period of staffing turbulence. As a result, the headteacher's strategic plans for improvement have not been wholly effective.
- Good teaching is not consistent in all classes. Achievement in some other subjects, such as science, is too low.
- Other than in Reception and Year 6 and in writing in Year 2, too few pupils in other year groups reached the expected level at the end of last year.
- Pupils do not always demonstrate sufficient commitment to their work and their learning.
- Leaders and governors have not ensured that all parents understand why decisions have been taken.
- Pupils' progress is not currently rapid enough to enable some of those who have fallen behind to make up lost ground.
- The leadership team is very new and has yet to have sufficient impact on the quality of teaching.
- On occasions, the behaviour of a small number of pupils is not managed well enough and this disturbs the learning of others.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and governors have actively tackled previously weak teaching.
- In 2015, all Year 6 pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, and a number of them exceeded this standard.
- The headteacher has quickly ensured that members of the new staff team have a shared understanding of areas for improvement. They are already working together well and show real determination and commitment.
- Governors, supported by the local authority improvement board, have improved the level of challenge and support that they provide, particularly in respect of pupil achievement.
- The provision for children in early years is good and the number of them reaching a good level of development has risen due to better teaching.
- The headteacher and all adults in the school know every child well and take all steps to keep them safe. Pupils talk positively about the care that is shown towards them in school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure good teaching is consistent across all classes, so that pupils make accelerated progress, by:
 - ensuring lessons are more closely matched to pupils' abilities in all classes and subjects
 - implementing a tailored programme of professional development to improve individual teachers' skills
 - developing the early work that has begun to improve the use of assessment in lessons
 - teaching pupils the skills they need to be better able to challenge themselves
 - ensuring that all adults in classes recognise and fulfil their responsibilities for supporting teaching and learning.

- Develop leadership across the school by:
 - providing opportunities for staff to observe each other and share best practice
 - providing leadership training so that staff understand how to evaluate and improve the practice of others
 - ensuring governors take greater responsibility for explaining to parents the governing body's strategic vision for the school, the reasons for decisions taken, and for reassuring parents, especially those of disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs, that stability is being re-established.

- Improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes by:
 - ensuring a consistent approach by all adults in school towards managing the small amount of challenging behaviour demonstrated by a few pupils
 - ensuring teachers consistently expect pupils to listen, concentrate and work productively in lessons
 - ensuring lessons are more engaging so that pupils want to take part.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Managing the high turnover of staff over the past year and recruiting new staff have taken a great deal of the headteacher's time and energy. She has had to take on many additional roles, such as leading literacy, mathematics and special educational needs across the school. As a result, the impact of leadership in improving teaching and learning and ensuring high standards was reduced.
- The newly appointed acting deputy headteacher has strengthened the school's leadership capacity. He is taking on responsibility for leading mathematics and English, and has already made positive inroads towards improvement. However, it is early days and this work has yet to demonstrate a significant impact on raising pupils' achievement.
- The headteacher has an accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Plans to improve the quality of teaching and learning are clear and appropriate. However, while these have been effective in bringing about improvement in the early years class, they have not been wholly successful across the school. Training provided by leaders, including for newly qualified teachers, has secured some improvements but has yet to ensure that the quality of teaching is good overall.
- While a number of parents spoke positively about how the school has managed changes, a few remain concerned. Not enough has been done by leaders, including governors, to reassure parents that effective steps have been taken to re-establish stability.
- Pupils have the opportunity to learn a wide range of subjects and enjoy lessons such as art and physical education (PE). However, not enough has been done to ensure that what is taught in these subjects develops pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding sufficiently. The headteacher recognises this and recently rewrote plans to improve the science curriculum. However, the implementation of these plans is at an early stage and has yet to be evident in improved standards of science work.
- The headteacher and governors have bravely tackled weaknesses identified in teaching, accepting that this would mean staff turnover. They have persevered with recruitment and sought the help of the local authority to enable the appointment of a new senior member of staff to increase the school's leadership capacity.
- British values are promoted effectively. Opportunities, such as work on Magna Carta, enable pupils to understand democracy and this is developed further through school systems, such as the school council. The school's work on values ensures that pupils understand and show tolerance and respect for others.
- Work, such as the links with Kenyan schools, enables pupils to learn about the wider world and to develop their cultural understanding. Pupils are taken on trips which broaden their experiences. A trip to the opera was followed up by pupils creating their own performance of *Macbeth*. Pupils develop their spiritual understanding well in assemblies and through opportunities for reflection in lessons such as art.
- Leaders are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils. Their in-depth knowledge of each pupil and their families means that they tailor support well. Funding provided to support those who are disadvantaged is well used. As a result, the majority of pupils who are disadvantaged, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress.
- The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities, including art and sports clubs. Funding provided to promote sports through the sports premium is well used. The provision of a PE coach has had a positive impact on improving participation in sports at after-school clubs and is also improving teachers' knowledge of how to teach PE.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors have supported the headteacher in tackling previous weaknesses in teaching but have relied too much on the headteacher to explain the decisions taken to parents.
 - Governors welcomed the support of the local authority improvement board and as a result, have increased their skills. They are now better able to both support and challenge the school. Governors recognise the progress the school has made since the last inspection but know that the staffing changes mean that further improvement is needed.
 - Minutes of governing body meetings demonstrate that governors ask challenging questions about the achievement of pupils, including those eligible for pupil premium funding.

- Governors hold teachers, including the headteacher, to account through performance management. They draw on information about the quality of teaching and learning, pupils' outcomes and performance against targets set to make well-considered decisions about who should or should not progress up the pay scale.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school carries out careful risk assessments and appropriate checks on those who work in the school. Training in safeguarding is regular and those newly appointed receive full training. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities with regard to safeguarding and child protection. The safeguarding governor visits the school regularly, checking on policies and procedures. Pupils told the inspector that they feel safe in school and all parents who completed the Ofsted questionnaire also agreed that their child is safe in school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- A large number of changes of teachers in this small school has resulted in variable quality of teaching over time. At the time of the inspection of the four class teachers, one had been in post since September and two had taken up their posts a week prior to inspection. New teachers are quickly establishing positive relationships with pupils, who are responding accordingly. However, teachers are still getting to know the school's systems and what their pupils can do, so teaching is not yet typically good in all classes.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils should and can achieve are not consistently high enough. In some lessons, pupils are allowed to work too slowly and without enough concentration; as a result, pupils do not make enough progress.
- Leaders acknowledge that, over time, lessons have not regularly provided sufficient challenge for all pupils, particularly the most able. New staff are beginning to redress this and there are early signs of improvement evident in pupils' books.
- Too few opportunities are provided for pupils to apply their knowledge and skills. In mathematics lessons, pupils do not apply their knowledge to problems frequently enough. Opportunities to deepen skills in English and mathematics by using them in other subjects are not well used. For example, when writing in science, pupils are not routinely expected to use what they have learned in literacy lessons to produce good-quality writing.
- Feedback is provided by teachers in line with the school's policy and in some instances, this is helping pupils to improve their work. In other cases, it is less helpful because the 'next steps' are written in language that is too difficult for pupils to understand. For example, in one class, a pupil told the inspector that he did not understand the feedback and another pupil joined in, saying, 'I've read it to him, but even I don't understand what it means!'
- The teaching of reading is too variable. Pupils talk about enjoying reading and in some classes, a love of books and reading is promoted through, for example, reading displays linked to the class topic. However, phonics sessions are not always tailored sufficiently well to ensure that those who need support receive it while those that need to move on more swiftly are able to do so.
- While some teaching assistants work effectively with the class teacher, others are only focused on supporting individuals with additional needs and do not always contribute to learning more widely when it is appropriate to do so.
- Where teaching is engaging, pupils show good levels of enthusiasm and involvement. In these lessons, pupils are keen to participate in learning tasks, challenge themselves and make good progress. For example, pupils in a Years 5 and 6 lesson were investigating angles. The teacher posed challenging questions and pupils were keen to discuss and justify their views based on their mathematical knowledge.
- Pupils are beginning to develop greater commitment to improving their own learning. The new assessments that enable pupils to rank their level of understanding at the start, middle and end of a lesson are being well used by the oldest pupils. However, the system is not as well understood by younger pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Adults in the school know each child and their needs well. Pupils talk positively about the care they receive. For example, when they have worries or problems there is always someone to talk to.
- Pupils care for each other and are very supportive of each other, including those who have additional needs.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are closely supported. Education, health and care plans are managed well and the provision is regularly reviewed. Liaison with other agencies such as speech therapists helps the school to provide the right support for pupils with additional needs. As a result, the majority of these pupils make good progress from their starting points. However, a few parents of pupils with additional needs expressed concerns that, in the absence of the leader for special educational needs, communication was not as good. These parents said that they were unsure how much was being currently being done to support their child in school.
- Pupils are confident that bullying is rare. They understand how to keep themselves safe, including e-safety. Pupils talked knowledgeably about what they had learned about safety through the 'crucial crew' sessions. Pupils enjoy taking on additional responsibilities, such as roles as assembly monitors and play leaders. Play leaders talked with pride about their work, explaining that they undertook annual training in order to fulfil their role.
- The school's pastoral team works effectively with the parent support worker to target support where it is needed, including to improve attendance.
- Pupils show confidence in talking with adults about the school and their learning. Older pupils value the opportunities they are now being given to challenge themselves, but this is at an early stage.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement because pupils' attitudes to learning are not always good. In some lessons, pupils do not concentrate because the lessons are not sufficiently engaging and teachers' expectations of behaviour are not high enough. In some lessons, teachers do not routinely make clear their expectations of what pupils should achieve and sometimes allow pupils to talk when they should be listening. Work in books shows that sometimes teachers accept too little work or work that is not good enough relative to pupils' abilities.
- Occasionally, the behaviour of a small number of pupils is not well managed; this disturbs the learning of others and slows their progress in learning.
- The majority of pupils are polite towards each other and towards adults. They cooperate well when working in pairs and groups, and when playing in the playground. Pupils understand the school's system of rewards and sanctions for behaviour, and say that it is mostly effective. They are confident that any problems will be sorted out by adults and that the lunchtime room helps those pupils who have difficulties when their time is less structured.
- Attendance is below average. Holidays taken in term time have impacted adversely on overall attendance. The headteacher has addressed this robustly, discussing cases with the governing body, and issuing penalty notices and regular reminders to parents about the importance of regular attendance. Improving the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has been a particular focus of the school and has been successful in reducing absence for some of these pupils. Nevertheless, there is more to be done to ensure that attendance for all pupils improves.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- In 2015, pupils in Year 6 made good progress and achieved well in reading, writing and mathematics. However, achievement in these subjects for pupils across the school was not as good; as shown in books and in the school's own assessment information, too many pupils ended the year below the level expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Progress over time and since the beginning of this academic year has not been rapid enough to enable those pupils who have fallen behind to make up lost ground. The school has set ambitious targets for the end of this school year. A range of additional support has been put in place to help pupils reach their targets, and parents have been made aware of expectations through target cards that are sent home. Leaders and new staff recognise, however, that there is still much work to be done to raise achievement for all pupils in English and mathematics.
- Achievement in the Year 1 phonics check was below the national average in 2015. This was because pupils did not make rapid enough progress in Year 1 to enable them to catch up previously lost ground in reading.
- Achievement in other subjects, such as science, is too low. Work in books shows that expectations in these subjects is not always high enough and so the quality of work produced is not as good as pupils are capable of. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 have completed a range of science tasks but too much emphasis has been placed on pupils recording what they have done rather than reflecting on the scientific concepts they have discovered.
- The most-able pupils are not being sufficiently challenged and so are not all making as much progress as they are capable of. This is particularly evident in mathematics where the less-able and most-able pupils are sometimes being given work at the same level, and which is too easy for the most-able pupils.
- The progress of the majority of disadvantaged pupils is good. These pupils are closely tracked and provision put in place to help them to succeed.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress relative to their starting points. Careful tracking of their achievements in all areas is done, and provision is modified where necessary to ensure that the needs of these pupils are well met.

Early years provision

is good

- When children start at the school, the majority have skills typical for their age. Children in 2015 made good progress and the proportion achieving a good level of development was above national averages. This is a significant improvement on previous years and is the result of well-targeted training and support for teaching and learning in the Reception class.
- Continuing good practice in the Reception class means that all children, including disabled children and those with special educational needs, are making good progress. They are being well prepared for learning in Year 1.
- The early years leader has a good grasp of the strengths and areas for improvement for the class and for the staff's professional development. She has carried out a rigorous self-assessment, which has been used over the past year to improve provision, resulting in much better outcomes for children.
- Adults promote children's personal, social and emotional development and as a result, children behave well. They cooperate with each other and play sensibly together. Expectations of behaviour, including listening to each other, putting hands up before speaking and looking after equipment, are regularly reinforced by adults.
- Reading is taught well and children enjoy phonics sessions led by the teacher and the teaching assistant. These sessions are tailored to the children's needs and as a result, children make good progress in their knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). In 2015, all children reached the expected standard in the early learning goal for reading and a good proportion exceeded this standard.
- Assessment is good, with careful and accurate assessments of what children can do when they start in the Reception class. Learning journeys provide a clear picture of children's progress over time. Parents contribute to the picture of achievement, for example through recording 'wow!' moments.
- Parents speak positively about the start children are given at the school. The regular induction sessions, together with a part-time week where parents gradually leave their children for longer each day, are welcomed. Home visits are also used well so that when children start in September, parents say they settle quickly.

- Most learning activities are well planned to provide good challenge for children. Occasionally, tasks are not well matched to children's abilities and so do not move children forward in their learning.
- The outdoor area provides a good space for learning activities but is not organised along the same lines as the indoor environment. A lack of storage means that equipment is sometimes left outside and becomes weathered and unattractive for children to play with. As a result, learning opportunities outside are not as well developed or well used.

School details

Unique reference number	115187
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10001929

This inspection 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	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tina Cutler
Headteacher	Sophie Massey
Telephone number	01621 860253
Website	www.tolleshuntarcy-st-nicholas.essex.sch.uk
Email address	admin@tolleshuntarcy-st-nicholas.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24–25 October 2013

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average primary school. There are four classes, three of which are mixed-aged classes. Children in Reception are taught as a single class.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is average. This is extra funding for pupils eligible for free school meals or for children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported by a statement or education, health and care plan is above average.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed lessons in all classes, assembly, playtimes and lunchtimes. Some joint observations were carried out with the headteacher. The inspector looked at pupils' books with senior leaders, school assessment information, the headteacher's evaluation of teaching and learning, and a range of school documents.
- The inspector met with a selection of parents in the playground and with some pupils from Years 5 and 6. In addition, she heard a small number of pupils read.
- The inspector met with a representative from the local authority and with three members of the governing body.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils were examined, including mandatory checks made during the recruitment of new staff, arrangements for e-safety (keeping children safe online when using electronic media) and risk assessments undertaken for educational visits.
- The views of 21 parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account, and 13 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Maria Curry, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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