

Meppershall Church of England Academy

107 High Street, Meppershall, Shefford SG17 5LZ

Inspection dates

23–24 February 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- This is a good and improving school. After a period of turbulence the school's governors have secured effective long-term leadership.
- The headteacher has restored the community's faith in the school and its popularity is rising.
- Standards are rising in the school and are above the national average at the end of Key Stage 1, significantly so in reading and writing.
- The quality of teaching in the school is good and improving. The headteacher has successfully created a culture of continual improvement and ambitions and expectations are high.
- Behaviour in the school is good because the rules and the consequences of breaking them are clear. Pupils are polite, well mannered and friendly.
- Pupils rightly feel safe at school. Bullying happens rarely and pupils know that staff will help them if a problem should occur.
- The early years class provides children with a good start to their education. Children make good progress in the Reception class and are prepared well for the demands of Year 1.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Too few pupils make rapid progress in learning phonics (letters and the sounds they make) because teaching in this area is not fully effective.
- School improvement systems, although effective, are underdeveloped and are not strategic enough.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the teaching of phonics so that pupils make more rapid progress by ensuring that:
 - new sounds and spellings are taught clearly, explicitly and systematically
 - pupils routinely practise new sounds verbally before attempting to write them
 - pupils are given plentiful opportunities to practise blending sounds together in order to read, and segmenting words into their individual sounds in order to spell
 - the most-able pupils are challenged sufficiently during phonics sessions.
- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is more analytical and less descriptive in order to identify areas for further improvement more precisely
 - the school's action plan is refined, developed and extended to become a more useful document to guide the school's development and by which governors can hold the school's leaders to account.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher has brought much-needed stability to the school after a turbulent and unsettled period. In a relatively short time, she has gained the confidence of the entire community. Parents, staff and governors commented on how much the school has improved under the headteacher's leadership. One member of staff commented that, 'Working at this school under [the headteacher's] leadership is a privilege and a joy – something very rare in the teaching profession today.'
- The school's popularity in the local area fell following the last inspection of its predecessor school, and the number of pupils on roll dropped. This trend has been reversed and the roll is rising once again.
- The school's leaders have focused well on improving the quality of teaching. The headteacher has developed trust among staff so that monitoring activity is viewed positively rather than as a threat. Although some weaker teaching remains, the headteacher is well aware of the strengths and weaknesses in the school and is not afraid to take prompt action when necessary. Staff are provided with good opportunities to develop their professional practice; for example, one teacher has gained the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordinators.
- The school's curriculum is broad, balanced and interesting. The school teaches a mixture of both 'stand-alone' subjects and topic-based learning and this approach works well for them. The school's curriculum is enriched by a good range of extra-curricular activities, educational visits and visitors to the school (such as to provide a workshop on the Stone Age). Pupils take part in a wide range of activities, including a residential visit in Year 4 and singing in the mass Young Voices choir at the O2 Arena.
- The pupil premium grant is spent effectively. The grant provides additional government funding for pupils who are eligible for free school meals, those in the care of the local authority and the children of service men and women. The school's leaders ensure that they monitor the progress of disadvantaged pupils and service children separately so that better progress by one group does not mask weaker progress by the other. The school's leaders look carefully at the needs of individual pupils and put actions in place to support pupils as necessary.
- The primary physical education (PE) and sports premium is spent effectively. PE lessons are now better planned than previously and teachers feel more confident because a scheme of work has been purchased to guide their teaching in this area. Pupils now have the opportunity to experience a far wider range of sports through clubs such as cheerleading and softball. The school is a member of the local sports partnership and this has increased the range of competitions that pupils now participate in.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern British society. The school's leaders and governors are well aware that the school's ethnic mix is not fully reflective of modern Britain and are taking steps to broaden pupils' experiences. For example, pupils have recently undertaken a 'faith tour' to widen their knowledge and experience of religions other than Christianity.
- Self-evaluation is generally accurate and the school has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. However, self-evaluation sometimes lacks a sharp and analytical approach. It is too descriptive and is not sufficiently self-critical. Self-evaluation does not examine weaknesses closely enough to diagnose precisely what needs to be done to improve the school further.
- The school's action planning is limited. Until very recently the headteacher has, by necessity, been 'firefighting' in order to swiftly and successfully tackle the school's most obvious weaknesses. Leaders acknowledge that they now must take a more strategic approach to school improvement by taking a longer-term view of what they want to achieve and ensuring that plans include features (such as measurable success criteria, clear milestones and sharp and specific targets) that enable governors to hold the school's leaders to account.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors managed a difficult period for the school well. They sought appropriate advice when necessary and acted upon it in a timely fashion. Governors, with the support of the diocese, have secured the long-term leadership of the school and, as a result, the school is now on a clear upward trajectory once again.
 - Governors know the school well. They have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and they receive good-quality information from the headteacher. Governors understand the assessment information that is presented to them and what it tells them about outcomes for different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the impact of the pupil premium grant.

- Governors know about the quality of teaching in the school from their scrutiny of assessment information, feedback from moderation and from the reports that the headteacher provides them with. Governors do not use the regular visits by the diocese-appointed adviser to check the information that they are given.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Robust systems are in place to safeguard children. Staff know how and when to report concerns and the headteacher makes appropriate and timely referrals when necessary. The headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body have both recently undertaken 'Prevent' duty training and plans are in place to cascade this information to the rest of the governors imminently.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching is good overall and improving. The school has a very positive atmosphere and it is clear that staff are ambitious for the school and for its pupils. Outcomes are improving because there is a shared desire to do the very best for pupils. The quality of teaching in Year 4 is a particular strength and the headteacher is already using this best practice to raise standards elsewhere.
- The quality of teaching in the school is monitored effectively and this has ensured a clear focus on continued improvement. Leaders use a combination of lesson observations, learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work to make accurate judgements on the overall quality of teaching in the school.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and this enables them to teach clearly and explicitly. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the grammar requirements of the new National Curriculum and, as a result, pupils' skills in this area are developing well.
- The school has introduced a new system for monitoring and assessing the progress pupils make and this is now fully established. Teachers work closely together to ensure that their assessments are accurate and they also check their judgements with teachers from other local schools. Assessments made at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 were recently moderated by the local authority and found to be accurate.
- The teaching of mathematics has been strengthened by partnerships with other local schools. Pupils worked with the local middle school on a mathematics project, extending their problem-solving skills while raising money for charity. The school is also working with a mathematics specialist from a local upper school to improve the quality of teaching in the subject. The introduction of practical resources for counting and adding has had a notable impact on speeding up the progress of pupils who find these areas difficult.
- Pupils enjoy their learning because teachers make lessons interesting and enjoyable. Topics such as 'paws, claws and whiskers' capture pupils' interest and imagination. Teachers make meaningful links between subjects and they have found that these have a direct impact on improving pupils' writing. For example, in Key Stage 2, pupils are reading *Stig of the Dump* while learning about the Stone Age. Their knowledge and understanding of the historical setting clearly motivated them to want to write about the characters in the story.
- Teachers have focused well on improving the quality of feedback that pupils receive about their work and this is having an impact on improving the progress they make. Pupils are set individual targets and use these frequently to help them to improve their work.
- Pupils know what they are learning about because teachers usually focus on what they want pupils to learn, rather than what they want them to do. Teachers reinforce this by returning to important teaching points frequently during lessons. For example, in a Year 3 mathematics lesson the teacher regularly reminded pupils to 'check what we're measuring in' to ensure accuracy.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability are taught well. Teachers make necessary adaptations to meet pupils' needs without fuss or unnecessary attention. Teaching assistants support individual pupils well and ensure that pupils play a full and active part in the life of the school.
- The teaching of phonics is not fully effective. Although pupils make progress in this area, it is not as rapid as it could be. Teaching is not always explicit enough for pupils to grasp quickly what they are taught. Pupils are not given enough opportunities to practise saying new sounds out loud. Similarly, they are not given sufficient opportunities to practise blending sounds together to read words or segmenting words into their separate sounds in order to spell them.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel safe at the school and feel free from bullying. They know that they should tell a teacher if they are worried about anything and they trust that teachers would sort things out if necessary.
- Attendance is broadly in line with the national average. Pupils' attendance is monitored closely and prompt and effective action is taken to address pupils' absence when necessary. The school knows its pupils very well and this enables leaders to take the right action to suit individual circumstances.
- A number of pupils attending the school are the children of service men and women. The school is aware of the specific issues affecting this group of pupils and takes appropriate action to support them. The 'time to talk' project provides pupils whose parents have been deployed to active service with a safe place in which to talk about their thoughts and feelings about their parents' absence. The headteacher has formed a link with the chaplain from the local military base.
- Staff have created an environment where pupils feel safe to get things wrong. Pupils know that we learn through making mistakes so they are not afraid to 'have a go'. The atmosphere in the school is positive and encouraging and this has a significant impact on helping pupils to learn.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good and teachers use positive behaviour management strategies well. Pupils follow the school's rules and they know that there are consequences for not following them.
- Pupils are polite and friendly. They are happy and enjoy coming to school. Pupils play well together during breaktimes and cooperate with each other well during lessons.
- Pupils were keen to speak to the inspector and to talk about their school and their work. They show good attitudes to learning and try hard.
- The school's records show that there are few incidents of bad behaviour. Robust systems are in place to deal with incidents when they do happen. The headteacher's personal involvement in dealing with more significant incidents, and her very firm line, ensures that repeated incidents are rare.
- Where there is weaker teaching, pupils sometimes lose interest in their lessons and minor low-level disruption (such as talking and fidgeting) occurs. The headteacher is fully aware of this and is already taking steps to address it.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Children generally enter the school with skills and abilities that are broadly typical of their age. In 2015, the proportion of children who achieved a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year was below the national average. However, there were clear reasons specific to the cohort for this lower result and children usually make good progress in the early years.
- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 was above the national average in 2015, significantly so in reading and writing, showing a clear rising trend. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels was also above the national average.
- The quality of work in pupils' exercise books shows clearly that current pupils are making good progress. By the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 4, their work matches age-related expectations with some pupils working above the expected level.
- School assessment information and the work in pupils' exercise books show that disadvantaged pupils, the most-able pupils, disabled pupils and those with special educational needs or disability all make good progress. Pupils' progress is monitored closely on an individual basis to ensure that all pupils achieve well.
- The proportion of pupils who reached the expected level of the phonics screening check was below the national average in 2015. The screening check is a statutory assessment of pupils' knowledge of the relationships between letters and sounds, taken towards the end of Year 1. Although attainment is starting to rise, not enough pupils make rapid progress. The most-able pupils are not challenged sufficiently during phonics sessions.

Early years provision

is good

- Early years is led well and children currently in the Reception class are making good progress. The curriculum is used well to engage and interest children and this has had a direct impact on the progress they make. At the end of the first half term, eight children were working below age-related expectations. Following a much-loved topic on dinosaurs, only two children were working behind age-related expectations. The school expects almost all children to achieve a good level of development this year.
- Good transition arrangements are in place for when children join the school. Staff visit children in their pre-school settings and at home, as well as offering opportunities for children to spend time in the school before they start. Children are also well prepared for the move from early years to Year 1.
- Assessment is thorough and appropriate. Staff use an online system to record their observations of children's progress and this means children's learning journals are readily accessible to parents via the internet.
- Behaviour in the Reception Year is good. Children learn the rules quickly and cooperate well with each other. The atmosphere is positive and pupils feel safe and comfortable in the early years environment.
- The early years classroom is bright and attractive and offers a good range of activities across the areas of learning. The outside area is less well developed. The early years leader is in the process of improving this, supported by the school's parents' association.
- Teaching is generally good but, as in the rest of the school, phonics teaching is not fully effective.

Academy details

Unique reference number	109620
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10003664

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	First
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	95
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Jones
Headteacher	Nickie Moore
Telephone number	01462 813293
Website	www.meppershall.beds.sch.uk/
Email address	meppershall@cbc.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy

Information about this school

- Meppershall Church of England Academy converted to become an academy school on 1 July 2013. When its predecessor school, Meppershall CofE VA Lower School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be good overall.
- Following a period of absence, the previous substantive headteacher left the school in November 2013. The headteacher from another local school supported the school initially and a second interim headteacher then led the school until the end of the autumn term. The current headteacher joined the school two years ago, initially in an interim capacity.
- This school is much smaller than the average-sized primary school. There is one class per year group from Reception Year to Year 4. There are fewer pupils in each class than is typical in most primary schools.
- Children join the Reception class in the September after their fourth birthday and attend full time.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium is lower than the national average. The pupil premium provides additional government funding for pupils who are eligible for free school meals, those in the care of the local authority and the children of service men and women.
- A very large majority of pupils are White British and the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is smaller than the national average. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is much lower than typically found nationally.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is similar to the national average. However, the proportion who have a statement of special education needs or disability, or an education, health and care (EHC) plan is much higher than the national average.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching and learning over time. The inspector observed parts of nine lessons, some jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspector looked closely at the work in pupils' exercise books, listened to them read and talked to them about their work.
- The inspector scrutinised the school's assessment information, records of leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning in the school, and a range of other school documents.
- The views of parents were taken into account, including 37 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and conversations with parents in the playground at the beginning of the school day.
- The inspector took account of the views of the 16 members of staff who completed and returned questionnaires.
- Meetings were held with pupils, staff, governors, a representative of the Diocese of St Albans and a representative of Central Bedfordshire Council.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. 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.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

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, further education and skills, 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.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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

© Crown copyright 2016

