

St Nicholas Church of England (Controlled) Primary School

Fairfield Road, New Romney, Kent TN28 8BP

Inspection dates

25–26 November 2015

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Pupils' progress is inadequate during Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment is too low at the end of both key stages.
- Significant weaknesses in teaching for a number of years have left pupils with substantial gaps in their basic knowledge and understanding. This limits their progress in English and mathematics.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils' learning are not high enough. Teaching does not extend and deepen the most-able pupils' understanding well enough. As a result, they make inadequate progress.
- Leadership over time has not been effective in securing the necessary improvements in teaching and learning.
- Teachers do not use assessments of pupils' progress well enough to plan learning. As a result, the work set is insufficiently challenging for some and too hard for others.
- Pupil premium funding is not used effectively to ensure disadvantaged pupils achieve well. They attain substantially less well than their classmates and their peers nationally.
- Some pupils find it difficult to sustain concentration during lessons so that they make limited progress.
- Children in early years do not make sufficiently rapid progress. Activities do not always build well enough on children's learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The recently appointed headteacher provides strong leadership. He has established a positive, upbeat atmosphere and made a good start in addressing urgent priorities for development.
- The new leadership team has successfully stopped the decline in achievement. Leaders have improved teachers' planning and established robust procedures for checking the quality of teaching and learning.
- Teaching has begun to address some of the gaps in pupils' basic knowledge and understanding.
- Children in early years are making better progress than before. They are settled, happy and secure.
- The Interim Executive Board (IEB) continues to play an effective role in the school's leadership.
- Pupils feel safe and valued. They want to do well and take increasing care with their work.

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in reading, writing and mathematics by securing recent improvements in teaching and by ensuring that teachers:
 - have the highest expectations of all pupils and groups of pupils
 - use assessment information to plan work which consistently meets pupils' differing needs
 - set work which challenges pupils appropriately and builds firmly on what pupils already know and can do
 - effectively check pupils' understanding during lessons and adapt teaching and activities appropriately where necessary.
- Embed the school's behaviour policy and persist in expecting every pupil to behave well during lessons.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - arrangements to systematically address the substantial gaps in pupils' basic knowledge and understanding are embedded and strengthened
 - all recommendations made in the recent review of pupil premium are addressed.
- Accelerate children's progress in early years by ensuring that activities are purposeful and build well on children's prior learning, particularly in the outdoor area.

An external review of governance is not recommended because the IEB is effective.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium is not recommended as one has been carried out very recently.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The school has been through a very turbulent and unsettled period. Numerous changes in staffing and poor staff morale have severely hindered improvements in teaching and learning since the previous inspection.
- Until recently, inaccurate and unreliable information about pupils' progress has limited teachers' and leaders' efforts to check that pupils are learning quickly enough.
- The new leadership team demonstrates the capacity to secure necessary improvements in teaching and learning. They have halted the decline in pupils' progress and reduced the amount of inadequate teaching in the school.
- The headteacher has established an orderly, purposeful and positive ethos in the school. The school environment is attractive and well organised. Pupils speak enthusiastically about improvements since the headteacher's appointment, particularly in behaviour.
- The headteacher has made sure that staffing arrangements are much more settled and stable, so that pupils benefit from more consistent teaching. As a result, while pupils are still not making sufficient progress, teaching is beginning to plug some of the gaps in pupils' basic literacy and mathematics knowledge and understanding.
- The headteacher and IEB members have strengthened leadership and the school's capacity to improve considerably. They have appointed a knowledgeable, enthusiastic and effective team of senior and middle leaders who understand and share the headteacher's vision for the school's future. Leaders have a clear and accurate view of what needs to be done to improve teaching and to raise achievement.
- The new leadership team has taken immediate steps to improve teaching. For example, the English leader makes sure that pupils have daily opportunities to write, so that pupils regularly practise and develop their writing skills. The mathematics leader introduced a systematic approach to teaching calculation skills across the school; pupils are now benefiting from more consistent teaching in mathematics. However, leaders are realistic about the further steps needed to ensure all teachers provide challenging work which meets the needs of all pupils.
- In the short time since his appointment, the headteacher has introduced wholesale changes in the way subjects are taught. The newly introduced curriculum appeals to pupils' interests so they are more motivated and engaged in their learning. However, not all pupils have equal opportunities to access learning because the work set is not always suitable for their needs. This is particularly the case for the most able, least able and disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is well promoted. Pupils regularly discuss social and moral issues, such as the pros and cons of fair trade products, sensibly and maturely. Activities such as these help pupils to develop some of the personal skills which will enable them to make a positive contribution to life in modern Britain.
- The school's religious ethos contributes well to pupils' spiritual development. For example, once settled, pupils listen well during assemblies, making perceptive comments and singing enthusiastically.
- In the past, pupil premium funding has not been used well to support disadvantaged pupils. As a result, the gap between this group's attainment and others nationally has grown. Leaders have now taken robust action to rectify the situation, making sure that remaining funds are used to better meet pupils' individual needs. For example, training for teachers has led to more challenging work being provided for pupils. Leaders have appointed a family liaison officer to strengthen links between families and school.
- A review of pupil premium was completed very recently, confirming the further steps needed to improve the use of funds to support pupils' learning. Leaders have made sure these are reflected in the school's robust development plans.
- Leaders are ambitious for all pupils, regardless of ability or background, and are determined to ensure all achieve well. They have introduced rigorous procedures for checking pupils' progress and have regular, challenging discussions with teachers to check pupils' learning. Leaders make sure that teachers are fully aware of pupils' needs and hold them to account for their learning. The headteacher's high expectations are clear throughout the school's documentation. For example, the school's development plan reminds staff: 'No dips, no gaps, no excuses – every grade counts'.
- Leaders make effective use of the teachers' standards to set ambitious targets for individual teachers. They regularly check the quality of teaching through observations of learning in lessons and by looking at

pupils' books. Senior leaders have put effective training and support in place to improve aspects of teaching. This approach has rapidly reduced the proportion of weak teaching, although some remains. Teachers are committed to developing their practice and staff morale has improved.

- Warm and positive relationships contribute well to pupils' well-being. Adults speak to pupils calmly and respectfully. All adults in the school respond consistently to any challenging behaviour among pupils and are very clear about how pupils are expected to behave. Pupils' behaviour has improved rapidly since the start of the autumn term, although some struggle to meet higher expectations at times.
- Leaders give parents more opportunities to visit the school and to find out about their children's learning. For example, they can find out about their children's work and how they can help at home by attending workshops, coffee mornings and visits to the classrooms. Parental confidence is growing. Most parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and who spoke with inspectors expressed confidence in the headteacher and recognised rapid improvements in the school's work.
- The primary sports premium is used well to support pupils' health and well-being. For example, leaders have increased the number of clubs offered to pupils and the school participates in a wider range of sporting competitions than previously. As a result, pupils are enthused about sport and more physically active.
- The local authority has worked closely with the school since the previous inspection, supporting them well in the appointment of a strong headteacher and in checking the quality of teaching. Accurate evaluations of teaching ensured the headteacher was well informed about some of the improvements needed from the outset, so no time was lost in making a start. The local authority recognise developments made by the headteacher in a very short time, including in the ethos of the school and in parental confidence.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The IEB members know the school well and continue to provide effective support and challenge for the school and play a key role in its improvement. They confidently question and challenge leaders about pupils' achievement, so that leaders are held to account well. They look at pupils' work with leaders and make sure that this is consistent with teachers' assessments of pupils' learning.
 - IEB members attend meetings about pupils' progress and so are well informed and up to date about achievement and about how this compares with other schools nationally. They share the headteacher's high expectations of staff and pupils and are determined to provide the very best education for all pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Recruitment and suitability checks are complete and updated regularly. Leaders ensure staff attend required safeguarding training and are well qualified. Pupils are well supervised during playtimes, lunchtimes and throughout the school day. The site is well organised, safe and orderly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is inadequate

- Substantial weaknesses in teaching for several years have led to pupils' underachievement and to significant gaps in their learning. Teaching across the school does not ensure pupils learn quickly enough.
- There are too many inconsistencies in the quality of teaching between different classes. Teachers do not use information about pupils' progress well enough to swiftly identify and address any gaps in their learning.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve are too low, particularly of the most able. The work set for these pupils is not sufficiently challenging to ensure they make enough progress. Teachers do not yet respond quickly and meaningfully to pupils' needs during lessons.
- Too often teachers set work which does not meet pupils' differing needs. As a result, sizeable groups of pupils make inadequate progress, including the most able, the least able and those with special educational needs. Some pupils struggle to complete work which is too difficult, while others complete tasks too easily. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Years 4, 5 and 6 completed similar unstimulating and unchallenging work on homophones which did not move their learning on strongly enough.
- There are clear signs of recent improvement in the quality of teaching. Teachers are committed to improving their practice and welcome advice. Teachers display pupils' work with care and classrooms are well organised and attractive. Pupils say they are more interested in learning because their teachers are more enthusiastic about teaching.

- The quality of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) teaching has improved. Teachers teach phonics skills regularly and consistently across the school. Teachers give pupils daily opportunities to read and write. This is giving pupils the practice needed to secure basic knowledge and skills. However, as in other subjects, teaching does not yet build well enough on previous learning or extend the most able sufficiently.
- While teaching assistants sometimes provide good-quality support for pupils, particularly when working with individuals, this is too variable between classes and year groups.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote personal development and welfare requires improvement. Some pupils do not yet demonstrate consistently good learning habits, such as persevering when the work is more difficult.
- Pupils say that learning is fun and feel that they are making better progress this year. They are proud to show others their achievements.
- Pupils like their new headteacher. They say he is always cheerful, tells them when they have done well and sorts things out properly. Pupils feel safe, valued and important.
- Most pupils listen carefully to what their teachers and classmates have to say. They cooperate with each other well and relationships are good.
- Pupils are happy to come to school. They attend regularly and attendance is consistently in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils persistently absent from school is average.
- Pupils have a sensible view of what they can do to stay safe. For example, they know why they must take care when using the internet and are confident about what to do if they have any concerns. Pupils say that teachers and visitors give them helpful advice about everyday safety, including road safety.
- Pupils know what bullying is and the various forms it can take but say it happens rarely. They have confidence in adults to help them if they have any worries and say their teachers stop any unkind behaviour straight away.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. At times, some pupils struggle to meet increased expectations of their behaviour and find it hard to stay focused in lessons. When this is the case, they make limited progress.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved since the start of the autumn term because adults consistently apply the school's behaviour policies. This ensures pupils are clear about how they should behave.
- Pupils are polite, welcoming and keen to learn. They move around school sensibly and safely. Most behave well during playtimes. They behave increasingly well during lessons so that most are busy and purposeful.
- Most pupils contribute enthusiastically and listen well during assemblies. However, some are slow to settle at the start of assemblies and need several reminders from adults to ensure they are in the right frame of mind for the occasion.

Outcomes for pupils are inadequate

- Pupils in Years 1 to 6 make inadequate progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment is much lower than the national average at the end of both key stages. This has been the case for several years. Improvements in attainment in 2014 were not sustained in 2015. Pupils have substantial gaps in their knowledge and understanding which hinder their progress.
- The most-able pupils do not make enough progress. Too few pupils attain the higher levels at the end of both key stages. In 2015, the proportions attaining Level 3 were below average in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 and lower than the previous year. At the end of Year 6, the proportions achieving Level 5 were much lower than the national average in all subjects.
- Disadvantaged pupils make inadequate progress. In 2015, this group's attainment was below national averages and lower than their classmates in all subjects and at both key stages. There were substantial

gaps between this group's attainment and the national average at the end of Year 6. While the gap narrowed slightly in 2014, this improvement was not sustained in 2015.

- Disabled pupils, the least able and those with special educational needs make slow progress. They often have difficulty completing the work set because it is too hard. As a result, the work in their books is sometimes of poor quality or unfinished.
- The results of the Year 1 phonics check are consistently below average. However, a more consistent approach to the teaching of phonics is giving pupils an increasingly secure grounding in basic reading and writing skills. Pupils are starting to use newly learnt phonics skills to help them to read and write.
- Pupils are writing with increasing confidence because they have more frequent opportunities to write. They write at greater length and with more care than before. However, while some pupils now make reasonable progress, too few are making the rapid progress needed to get them back on track to achieve adequately.
- Pupils are not yet sufficiently secure in their knowledge and understanding of fundamental mathematics. A whole-school focus on basic number and calculation is beginning to address gaps in pupils' learning. However, many still have a lot of catching up to do to secure average levels of achievement.
- By the end of Year 6, pupils are not sufficiently prepared with the knowledge and skills needed for the next stage in their education.

Early years provision

requires improvement

- Teaching is not strong enough to secure children's rapid progress during early years.
- In the past, inaccuracies in assessment information have hampered leaders' and teachers' efforts to measure children's progress and masked underachievement. Leaders have identified that an increase in the proportion of children achieving a good level of development in 2015 did not accurately reflect children's progress.
- The recently appointed early years leader is knowledgeable and experienced. She has ensured that assessments of children's knowledge and skills when they join Reception are accurate. This means that adults are able to measure children's progress more successfully than before. Staff are quicker to pick up on individual children's needs and put extra help in where needed.
- The early years leader has improved the use of the outdoor area to develop children's learning more effectively. The outdoor area is safe, clean, bright and attractive with a good range of appealing and interesting activities. However, at times some activities are not focused sharply enough on children's learning.
- A calm, busy atmosphere in the classroom sets the right tone for playing and learning. Children behave well because they are interested and engaged. They are eager to learn and get on well with each other and with adults. Warm, positive relationships ensure children feel secure so that they quickly grow in self-esteem. Effective liaison with pre-schools helps children to settle quickly when they join Reception.
- Leaders have high expectations of children and have set challenging targets for their achievement at the end of Reception. The early years leader has increased the emphasis on developing children's literacy, providing more activities to develop their writing skills. However, at times these activities lack sufficient challenge to move children's learning on more quickly.
- Early years provides an increasingly firm foundation for the next stage in children's learning, preparing children adequately for learning in Year 1.
- Leaders have introduced more opportunities for parents to find out about their children's learning. For example, 'play and learn sessions' give parents first-hand experience of what their children are doing in the classroom as well as tips about how they can help at home. Parents are increasingly confident about the school's work.

School details

Unique reference number	132829
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10001642

This inspection 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	340
Appropriate authority	The interim executive board
Chair	Lorraine Balcombe
Headteacher	Christopher Dale
Telephone number	01797 361906
Website	www.st-nicholas-newromney.kent.sch.uk
Email address	headteacher@st-nicholas-newromney.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–9 May 2014

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is above that found in most schools. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and looked after children.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is below average.
- In 2014, the school met the government's current floor standard, which sets the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school provides full-time early years provision in two Reception classes.
- There is a private nursery on site which is inspected separately.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and most of the teachers have been appointed since the previous inspection.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed learning in 24 lessons or part lessons, including three observed jointly with the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- The inspection team held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers, members of staff, parents and pupils. They also held a meeting with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board and two other members of the board.
- The inspection team took account of 33 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, they considered the views expressed by parents who spoke with them informally at the end of the school day.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and considered a range of documents, including the school's improvement plan, information about pupils' progress, attendance records and safeguarding policies.
- The inspection team looked at a sample of pupils' work provided by the school, as well as looking at pupils' work in lessons. They also listened to pupils in Year 3 and Year 6 read.

Inspection team

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