

# St Paul's Infant School

Hillary Road, Maidstone, Kent ME14 2BS

**Inspection dates** 14–15 June 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	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The headteacher is a strong and decisive leader. She has identified and successfully tackled previous weaknesses, supported improvements in teaching quality and ensured consistent, positive systems and routines. These actions have resulted in a cohesive and rapidly improving school.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently good across the school. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed and provide valuable support. Together teachers and teaching assistants promote positive relationships and enthusiasm in learning.
- Pupils' knowledge and skills have been too low in the past. The improvements in teaching are resulting in rising attainment and good progress across all groups and all ages.
- Children get off to a really good start in the Reception classes. The rising trend in children's achievements is particularly noticeable in the early years where improvements have been sustained and strengthened over several years.
- Relationships are positive and behaviour is good. Pupils cooperate well with others inside and outside the classroom. The school is a harmonious, diverse community where differences are both respected and celebrated. Pupils enjoy learning and are keen to do well.
- Good provision for pupils who arrive mid-year, sometimes with little knowledge of English, means that they settle, enjoy coming to school and learn quickly.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There are missed opportunities to stretch the most able pupils and raise their attainment further.
- Although gaps are closing, disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well as their classmates or other pupils nationally.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to learn in depth in subjects other than English and mathematics.
- Despite some success in increasing attendance, there is still a small group of pupils who have too many days off school.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement, particularly that of the most able pupils, in reading, writing, and particularly mathematics, and close the gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally, by:
  - raising everybody's expectations of what all pupils can achieve
  - planning activities, particularly in mathematics, which challenge all pupils
  - moving pupils on quickly during lessons to more challenging activities
  - providing more opportunities for pupils to learn in different subjects
  - continue with the most effective strategies to improve the attendance of those pupils who are persistently absent.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- There is no doubt that the dramatic changes in the school's population since the previous inspection put a strain on the school and exposed some weaknesses in the quality of teaching. The headteacher shows decisiveness and clarity of purpose in tackling these weaknesses. Her strong leadership has brought about an improvement in the ethos of the school, the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils. The overall quality and effectiveness of teaching have improved considerably, particularly this year, and are now consistently good across the school.
- Leadership has been strengthened since the previous inspection and the deputy head and key stage 1 and early years leaders make an important contribution to the direction and sense of purpose which is very evident throughout the school. Morale is high and the responses to the staff survey are overwhelmingly positive. Staff are proud to be part of the school, endorse the vision of leaders, feel well supported and believe that the school is a well ordered, calm and aspirational place to work.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate and appropriate priorities are being tackled effectively through the improvement plan. As this year has progressed, the targets set at the beginning of the year were reached early and re-set to increase the challenge. This is because there has been a constant spotlight on how well pupils are building up their skills and knowledge. School staff have worked closely with colleagues from other schools and local authority advisers and have implemented changes to improve provision and make sure that assessments are accurate.
- Leaders have managed a number of unavoidable staffing changes as smoothly as possible, including ensuring that the leadership of mathematics is picked up by another senior leader so that there is no slippage in this important issue for the school. Key staff have been deployed to ensure that Year 2 pupils, who had experienced the most staffing changes earlier in the year, have the high quality of teaching needed for them to catch up.
- The curriculum is planned so that it builds on and is relevant to the pupils' interests. The curriculum topics are based on good-quality children's books and themes that capture pupils' interest. The curriculum is well planned to meet the needs of pupils learning English and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There is broad coverage of different subjects, but an emphasis on English and mathematics, although understandable, reduces opportunities for pupils to learn about other subjects in depth. Nonetheless, opportunities are taken to inject excitement and wonder into the learning. For example, the recently hatched chicks are particularly fascinating to children in the early years. Good use is made of the school's outdoor spaces to develop independence and interest in the outside world.
- Values, including British values, are prominently promoted around the school and practised in assemblies and lessons. Respect is one of the school's key values and this is evident in the obvious respect for the wide variety of cultures and beliefs in this harmonious school. There is a strong focus on ensuring that all pupils, regardless of culture or background, are treated equally.
- Parents are generally positive about all aspects of school and there is increasing involvement of parents in their children's school life and achievement, particularly through the reading challenge activities and the early years tracking system.
- Additional government funding, for example for disadvantaged pupils and pupils from service families, and funding for sports and physical activities are very carefully allocated with a keen eye on what activities make the most difference. The headteacher commissioned an external review to look at pupil premium spending and identify what changes could be made to increase its impact. The review found that, by and large, the actions taken were appropriate. The school evaluates carefully the impact of actions and in some cases has discontinued support when it is not making enough difference or providing good value for money. The sports premium funding is spent well and the positive impact is obvious, with higher participation and a wider range of sporting activities on offer.
- **The governance of the school**
  - Governors are interested and involved in school life. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and regularly visit the school to evaluate progress and check on whether the targets in the improvement plan are being met. The clarity of these targets and termly milestones support this work.
  - Governors with responsibility for safeguarding carry out their responsibilities well. However, although safeguarding is often discussed at meetings, neither it nor health and safety are standing items on the agendas. This means that governors are reliant on the headteacher to bring issues to their attention.

- The governing body is aware that it could improve its strategic impact further and is restructuring to achieve increased efficiency and effectiveness.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There are secure systems and routines. Almost all parents and staff agree that pupils are safe, happy and well looked after. All checks are rigorously carried out to make sure that adults in school are suitable to work with children. Pupils behave safely in class and around school. The systems for noting concerns are monitored carefully and regularly by the family liaison officer and the headteacher. There are high levels of supervision at lunchtime, before the start of the day, in class and at playtimes. Training is fully up to date, with recent enhanced training for staff to make sure they are fully aware of risks, such as the dangers of extremism, and school procedures and their responsibilities. The school fosters strong links with families and other agencies to make sure that pupils are safe.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good**

- There have been weaknesses in teaching in the past and earlier this year, particularly in Year 2. These have been resolved and, as a result of very effective teaching during the second part of this year, these pupils are making rapid progress and have caught up.
- Adults know the children well and relationships are positive. Lessons are well planned and organised, with a good range of activities, good use of resources and some challenges open to all. However, expectations about what pupils can achieve are still sometimes a little low and teachers do not always act quickly enough to move pupils, particularly the most able, on to more challenging activities.
- Teachers make good use of specific language to model speaking and listening and they use effective questioning to develop pupils' learning further. A good range of stimuli is used to build on children's interests and support their learning, for example, using photographs from class visits to promote memories and discussion. The quality of learning environments and use of resources are strong. The environment celebrates a range of subjects, particularly writing, and table-top resources support learning well.
- Teachers try to make learning fun and build on the pupils' interests. They recognise that boys have not achieved as well as girls in literacy and choose topics and books, for example about dragons and aliens, which engage the interest of boys and girls alike. Teachers build on this enthusiasm effectively across different subjects. For example, Year 1 pupils were very enthusiastic about writing dragon poems and using toy dragons' eyes to count in twos.
- Adults teach early reading, including phonics (the sounds that letters represent), well so that pupils use their knowledge of these letters and sounds in independent reading and writing when trying to read or spell unfamiliar words. Teachers encourage pupils to review and edit their own work. Pupils in all year groups show that they can improve their own writing.
- There is good support for pupils who have special educational needs and for those who are new to the school or are learning English. As well as specific teaching, effective use of visual materials and reminders help all pupils to pick up language quickly.
- Adults are skilled at boosting morale when children become discouraged if they begin to find things a bit tricky or feel that they are falling short somehow. The school values of resilience and aspiration permeate the work in classrooms. There are regular opportunities for speaking and listening, thinking and explaining. This is supporting the learning of all pupils, particularly those at the early stages of learning English.

Teachers record pupils' achievements accurately and use information about what they can do and need to do next to plan learning effectively. Teachers generally spot pupils' misunderstandings quickly. For example, in a mathematics lesson about money, the teacher picked up quickly that some pupils were still a little confused about the values of the different coins and needed more work on this aspect.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good**

#### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.

- There is a strong focus on personal development and good systems to identify and support pupils in need of extra support, such as counselling or nurture activities, to enhance their well-being. This makes a positive difference, particularly to the most vulnerable pupils.
- The adults promote cooperative play at lunchtimes. The physical environment and the available resources support stimulating, enjoyable, collaborative play.
- Children respect the views of others and are excited about and celebrate one another's efforts. For example, the older 'helping hands' pupils wear their distinctive red caps with pride and are able to explain the contribution they make to making sure the school is a happy place.
- The school's values are threaded through everyday life and highlighted in assemblies, such as the one during the inspection on aspiration. The pupils responded excitedly to the clips of Olympic athletes. They could explain what aspiration was and how they could demonstrate it themselves. Year 2 pupils developed these ideas in their 'bucket lists' of aspirations for their next steps into junior school.
- The staff, and in particular the family liaison officer, develop strong relationships with families to boost attendance and help new pupils settle quickly. The school's emphasis on togetherness is exemplified in this work.
- The school rightly places a high priority on making sure that pupils are ready to come into school, and move on to the next class and the next school. Arrangements to smooth transition in and out of the school are good, which helps pupils, particularly mid-year arrivals, to get to know the school routines quickly, and build their confidence so that they settle and start learning quickly. Several parents commented positively on the difference that this had made to their child and the whole family.

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good
- Pupils enjoy being together, so that behaviour and attitudes in and out of lessons are good. Pupils are very polite, helpful and interested in the world and other people. They are confident to speak to adults and friendly and polite to visitors. They say that the school is caring and people are kind. They usually concentrate on their learning and try to do their best.
- Adults provide consistent behaviour management which rewards positive behaviour and encourages all pupils to live up to the high expectations about how to behave in school. Although a few parents are concerned about poor behaviour and bullying, the pupils report that there is very little poor behaviour or bullying in school. They say that someone will always sort things out if people fall out. Occasionally, they become a bit restless towards the end of a session or when waiting in line for their lunch.
- Attendance in the past has been below the national average, particularly for some groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. Overall attendance has risen so that it is around the national average this year. There are still too many pupils who take a lot of time off school and there is a gap between the attendance of all pupils and disadvantaged pupils. This disadvantages them still further and the school is working hard to encourage parents to make sure that their children attend as often as possible to get the most out of the education on offer.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

### **are good**

- Historic data shows low attainment over time, especially in writing and mathematics and at the higher levels. The sharp increase in the numbers of pupils arriving mid-year, sometimes with very little previous schooling and little English, has adversely affected the end of key stage 1 data since the previous inspection and particularly the data from last year. Only 45 of 90 Year 2 pupils last year started the school in Reception. Almost all of the pupils who had been with the school since the beginning of Reception made good progress and achieved at least the expected levels for their ages when they left in Year 2. About half of the pupils who started mid-year either in Year 1 or Year 2 also achieved the expected levels. Some of the pupils who arrived with little English made rapid progress and achieved the expected levels in reading and mathematics but not in writing.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching are having a positive impact on the rate of progress and learning of current pupils. Throughout the school, there is a rising trend in the proportions of pupils achieving the reading, writing and mathematics skills expected for their ages. Pupils are now making good and accelerating progress from their different starting points. A close scrutiny of books, assessment information and observations shows that their skills and knowledge are improving rapidly.

- Over the past three years, there has been a sustained improvement in the achievement of pupils in the early years, so that the proportion of this year's Reception children who are on track to achieve typical knowledge and skills for their age is likely to be above the national average.
- In Year 1, attainment is also rising so that the vast majority of pupils are on track to reach the expected standard in the phonics screening check. This is as a result of effective teaching of reading and also because the school is encouraging more children to read at home with their parents. Achievement in reading is stronger than in other subjects. Pupils read well and are keen to discuss their books.
- In Year 2, some pupils have experienced staffing changes and, for a time, this slowed their progress. The pupils' books and the school's checks show that pupils are now catching up rapidly.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported and make similar progress as other groups, and their books show good progress, particularly since September.
- There remains a gap between the achievement of disadvantaged groups and other pupils in school and nationally, although the in-school gaps are closing. In some year groups, the small number of disadvantaged pupils skews the data, for example when they have special educational needs, are new to the school or have other additional needs.
- Overall, the pupils from service families do well in school and are the highest performing group.
- Children work hard and with enthusiasm. In Year 1 classes, pupils were totally involved with improving their dragon poems and videoing themselves performing their finished results. It is obvious that writing has had a high focus across the school with some lovely examples on display in all classes and in the pupils' books. A little inconsistency remains across the school in handwriting, but most pupils use their pens and pencils and form their letters correctly and a revised policy has been recently introduced to strengthen cursive writing.
- There has also been a focus on mathematics this year and skills are improving, although this still remains the weakest aspect. There has been a change in mathematics teaching to incorporate problem-solving and reasoning activities in everyday mathematics. Pupils focus well in lessons, and discuss and explain their reasoning and how they are working out the answers. The work in the books shows that some pupils have opportunities to take on additional challenges. The books also show that sometimes pupils still finish whole sheets before moving on, even when it is clear that they are able to solve the problems easily and could be moved on more quickly.
- Each age group is well prepared for the next steps and Year 2 pupils are acquiring the skills necessary to move successfully into key stage 2.

## Early years provision

is good

- Many children start school with skills and knowledge below those typical for their age. Weaknesses in communication, speech and language are common. Improvements in leadership, teamwork and the quality of teaching and learning are resulting in a sharp rise in children's achievements. The children make good progress during their time in Reception and will be moving confidently into Year 1 in September.
- The early years leader's strong vision is communicated well, and shared by all staff. There are good systems in place for the early years team to plan together. Staff are carefully deployed to support and encourage the learning, well-being and safety of the children. They work well together to assess how well the children are learning and what they need to do next. Assessments are accurate.
- The learning environment is welcoming, stimulating and well organised. Resources are readily accessible, and this helps children find what they need and tidy away independently and confidently.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good and the positive impact, for example in reading and writing, is very evident in the way the children tackle different activities, in their books and on display. In mathematics, the children enjoy a good range of practical activities. For example, children very gently and accurately weighed the newly hatched chicks. In a writing lesson which capitalised on the school visit the previous day, children successfully used words related to time such as 'yesterday', 'before', 'later' and 'afterwards' in their writing.
- Adults give clear instructions and model good speaking and listening skills. There are many opportunities for children to follow instructions, which they do with alacrity. Children readily celebrate the successes of others. This was evident when spontaneous applause broke out following one child's successful mastery of javelin throwing.

- In the sessions when children choose their own activities, the rich environment offers many opportunities for learning through play. Adults are quick to spot when they can join in and use skilful questioning to promote deeper learning. During the inspection, children showed no regard for gender stereotyping; girls dug up worms and boys were writing.
- However, although children settle quickly to the different activities on offer, there are times, for example in early reading sessions, when they have to wait for the adult to move the learning on and there is a little loss of momentum. Some of the less adult-directed mathematics activities are not always well matched to the children's abilities. As with the rest of the school, there is scope to challenge the most able children even more.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about how well children are progressing, not just academically, but in confidence. Several used the word 'blossoming' to describe this process. The use of shared information about children's achievements is positively engaging parents and there are some lovely examples of two-way communication which show how the school values the positive impact that parents have on their child's learning and development.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	118461
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10002801

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Infant
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	273
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Anne Watts
<b>Headteacher</b>	Julie Oakley
<b>Telephone number</b>	01622 735322
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stpaulsmaidstone.co.uk">www.stpaulsmaidstone.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:headteacher@st-pauls-maidstone.kent.sch.uk">headteacher@st-pauls-maidstone.kent.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	22–23 May 2012

## Information about this school

- St Paul's is slightly larger than the average-sized primary school and larger than most infant schools. It is situated on the outskirts of Maidstone.
- There are three classes in each year group from Reception to Year 2.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils) is slightly below average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- About 15% of pupils come from families stationed at the nearby garrison. There are two battalions currently stationed at the garrison, one of which is British and the other Nepalese.
- Many more pupils join or leave the school at other than the usual times during the school year.
- Since the previous inspection, there has been a sharp rise in the proportion of pupils from a range of different, mainly Eastern European, countries who are new to learning English. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups, and who speak English as an additional language, are well above average. A total of 27 languages are spoken in the school.



## Information about this inspection

- This inspection started as an inspection of a good school under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. On day 1, the lead inspector converted the inspection into a full section 5 inspection in order to gather sufficient evidence to establish whether the school remained good. Three Ofsted Inspectors joined the lead inspector on the second day.
- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes and looked at the work in the pupils' books. On day 1, the lead inspector and the headteacher jointly observed learning in Year 1 and Year 2 classes. The early years children were out on a school visit. On day 2, further observations were carried out in all classes. During these observations, inspectors looked at pupils' books. They also carried out a further scrutiny of samples of pupils' books from Year 2.
- The lead inspector had lunch with pupils on day 1. Inspectors listened to pupils from Years 1 and 2 read and met informally with pupils at playtime and lunchtime.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of information provided by the school, including assessment information, safeguarding information, attendance records, self-evaluation and improvement planning documents, and records of governors' activities.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, three governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 30 responses to its online staff survey and 23 responses to Parent View (Ofsted's online parent survey). In addition, inspectors met informally with parents at the start of both days.

## Inspection team

Sheena MacDonald, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Lynda Welham	Ofsted Inspector
Nigel Cook	Ofsted Inspector
Rosie Beattie	Ofsted Inspector

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