

Folkestone, St Mary's Church of England Primary Academy

Warren Road, Folkestone, Kent CT19 6QH

Inspection dates

21–22 September 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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils, parents, staff and governors are, with justification, proud of their good school.
- The principal provides highly effective and inspiring leadership. The deputy principal very effectively supports him.
- They, together with other senior leaders and governors, share the determination and aspiration that pupils develop as well-rounded, confident individuals who achieve well in all that they do.
- As a result of strong leadership, the school has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils' achievement, behaviour and the quality of teaching and learning are all now good.
- The curriculum is stimulating and provides pupils with a wealth of interesting and exciting learning opportunities.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Pupils are inspired and motivated by their teachers.
- Pupils behave well in lessons, around the school and in the playground. They feel safe and happy at school and are well looked after.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They are polite, respectful and friendly.
- All groups of pupils learn well and make good progress from their starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Phonics skills are taught well, which has helped to improve achievement in reading. Pupils' spelling skills, however, are not yet good enough.
- Children in the early years are taught well, settle very quickly into school life and make good and often rapid progress from their starting points.
- Through rigorous checks, senior leaders have a clear knowledge of the school's strengths and where improvements are needed. They have correctly identified that a very few inconsistencies in expectations for pupils' learning need to be tackled and eradicated.
- The role of some middle leaders is not yet having enough impact on the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes in the foundation subjects.
- Attendance is below the national average. The proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is higher than the national figure.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Senior leaders should sustain the improvement in outcomes by ensuring that all teaching and learning matches the quality of the best in the school and that pupils make rapid progress by:
 - making sure that expectations for pupils' learning are consistently high
 - improving pupils' spelling
 - strengthening the role of middle leaders so that they have a greater impact on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching and learning through enhancing the curriculum in their subject areas
 - building on their partnerships with families to further improve the attendance of those pupils who have higher rates of absence so that they do not miss out on important learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal provides very effective leadership for the school and is very well supported by the deputy principal. As a result, the school has improved since the previous inspection.
- The senior leaders for the different age groups, phase leaders, are highly motivated and appreciative of the opportunities to develop their leadership skills. They have responded well to the demands and high expectations of their role. They know they are accountable for the quality of teaching and learning and pupils' progress. The group of phase leaders agreed that they now, 'enjoy coming to work and feel trusted as professionals'.
- The enthusiasm of the principal and deputy principal ensure that staff morale is high. All leaders, staff and governors share an ambition and determination to build on the strengths and improvements forged since the previous inspection and work together as a supportive team to provide the best learning and personal experiences for pupils.
- Senior leaders have correctly identified the need to increase capacity for further school development and to move leadership and management to outstanding. Plans are in place to develop the role of some middle leaders in supporting and enhancing the curriculum and the quality of teaching in their subjects.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and express confidence in the leadership and staff. One parent summed up the views of many and wrote, 'I have seen a marked improvement in the school. The principal expects high academic standards but also values kindness, compassion, sharing, friendship and family values. His newsletters are very informative but written with heart and humour.'
- Senior leaders and governors rigorously check pupils' progress, the quality of teaching and learning and all aspects of the school's work. There is a clear, shared understanding of the strengths of the school and the key priorities for further development, which inform the school's improvement plan. If any weaknesses in the quality of teaching and learning are identified, support is given, action points are followed up and improvement is expected. Senior leaders are correctly aware that a few inconsistencies in the quality of teaching have yet to be eradicated.
- Support and regular training are carefully matched to whole-school priorities and individual development needs. As a result, staff have become more skilful and provision and outcomes for pupils have improved.
- Leaders carefully monitor the progress and the provision for different groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, the most able disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Any necessary additional support is quickly provided for individuals and groups.
- Leaders have used the pupil premium funding effectively to help reduce barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. This has included the appointment of extra staff and specialist teachers to provide appropriate additional support for pupils. The funding has also enabled disadvantaged pupils to participate fully in the entire life of the school, helping to promote their social and emotional development.
- The school makes good use of the primary physical education and sport funding. It is

spent in a range of ways, including the provision of sports specialists, a greater use of local facilities, more involvement in inter-school competitions and a wider range of clubs. An increased number of pupils participate in a range of activities. The funding effectively enhances the skills of pupils and teachers and therefore improves outcomes for pupils.

- A key factor in pupils' improved outcomes and their personal development is the impact of the curriculum. Leaders have designed a curriculum that inspires and motivates learners and is underpinned by pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Senior leaders have correctly identified plans to further enhance the curriculum through the developing work of middle leaders in their subjects.
- Art and design has a high profile in the school and inspectors were impressed with the high standards of pupils' work displayed around the school.
- Learning is enriched by a wealth of extra activities including trips and visitors to school, activities in the community and an international dimension, which has gained the school a British Council International School award. All of the activities help pupils to learn new skills and make a significant contribution to their personal as well as their academic development.
- One parent wrote, 'So many opportunities are given for children to be involved with something they wouldn't normally have the chance to do, like pop-up shops, curating a museum at a hotel or holding a French café. Such diversity and opportunity makes me proud to send my children to St Mary's.'
- Pupils learn about different cultures and customs through the international curriculum and have links with schools in many countries, including Sri Lanka, India and France. This work, the school's values, assemblies and the subjects taught foster pupils' understanding, tolerance and respect for people from different backgrounds and faith communities. Pupils' understanding of different faiths is evident, but can sometimes lack depth or contain factual inaccuracies.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain because staff and pupils demonstrate fundamental British values in all areas across the school. Pupils have a strong sense of community and understand the need for rules within the school and the wider society.

Governance of the school

- Governance has improved since the previous inspection and now:
 - provides a good level of challenge and support which has helped to secure improvements in pupils' achievements and teaching
 - holds leaders to account effectively for the school's performance
 - shares the ambition and aspirations of the principal to ensure that the school continues to improve
 - ensures that additional funding is used effectively to determine that it is making a difference for pupils
 - provides strategic direction and decision-making.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All staff are trained, policies are up to date and procedures are robust and well known by all staff. Record-keeping of any

concerns and referrals is detailed and well organised. There are strong relationships with parents and external agencies to ensure that pupils quickly get any support and help they need. Pupils' safety is promoted very well from the time they start in the Nursery in lessons and day-to-day activities. All procedures relating to the safe recruitment of staff are fully met. As a result of the school's work, pupils said that they feel safe and the vast majority of parents agree that the school keeps their children safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Senior leaders have worked successfully to improve the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection. Professional development for teachers and teaching assistants and accurate guidance from senior leaders have all contributed to this improvement. As a result, pupils are making better progress.
- There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere within the school, which promotes learning well.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together in a culture of mutual support and strong teamwork. Most have high expectations of what pupils should be achieving over time and in individual lessons.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning, want to do well and work hard. Relationships between adults and pupils are good and as a result, pupils are confident to try things out and learn from their mistakes. They know that if they do not understand something, teachers will always take the time to explain and give further support.
- Pupils said that they find learning fun and interesting as well as challenging. Year 6 pupils demonstrated their enthusiasm for learning after a visit to the local area. This was part of their project on photography and the regeneration of Folkestone. The project gives pupils a wealth of opportunities to apply their knowledge and understanding in a range of subjects and to learn for a clear and meaningful purpose. They were committed to their work and looking forward to exhibiting and selling their photographs in a public gallery.
- Teachers provide learning challenges for pupils of different abilities. Initially teachers guide pupils to make appropriate choices, but then give pupils increasing responsibility to choose the correct level of learning. Teachers are generally skilful in questioning pupils to check on learning and pick up on any misunderstandings as well as extending pupils' thinking and depth of learning. As a result, the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are making good and better progress than at the time of the previous inspection.
- The school's policy for marking and feedback is generally used consistently well across the school. Pupils said that teachers' comments help them know how to improve their work. Pupils are usually clear about what they need to do to succeed and have increasing opportunities to reflect on their learning and progress and that of others.
- There is an appropriate emphasis on teaching reading, writing and mathematics and good opportunities to develop these skills in other subjects, particularly writing. Reading is promoted well across the school and reading at home is encouraged and helps pupils develop a love of reading. Small-group reading sessions effectively

develop pupils' skills, particularly in comprehension. Phonics teaching is good and has helped to improve pupils' skills in reading and writing in key stage 1.

- The teaching of mathematics has strengthened since the previous inspection and is now good. Pupils are given opportunities to apply their understanding to problem-solving and relevant activities and to develop their mathematical reasoning. This was evident when Year 4 pupils were investigating money problems and had to explain their learning to the rest of the class. This helped pupils, particularly the most able, make good progress and promoted a depth of knowledge and understanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils develop as confident, capable learners who are prepared well for the next stage of their education.
- Pupils have a strong voice in the school. They enjoy the responsibilities they are given and take them seriously, including the head boy and head girl, playground buddies and school council members. A group of pupils agreed with one who said, 'We like the way the school is run, it's not just by adults, the school council as well as other children all help the way the school is run.'
- Staff know individual pupils well and they effectively support each child to thrive and develop during their time in school. Staff work relentlessly with pupils and their families to help reduce any barriers to learning, particularly for those who may be vulnerable.
- Parents who responded to the questionnaire were very positive about the way the school cares for their children and keeps them safe.
- Pupils said that they feel safe in school and that any incidents of bullying are rare. They understand about different types of bullying and said that they are confident to talk to adults in school should any problems arise. They know how to keep themselves safe online.
- Pupils who attend the breakfast club get a safe and healthy start to the day. It is well attended and has helped some pupils to improve their attendance. At lunchtime, although pupils could talk about healthy eating, many lunch boxes did not reflect this awareness and pupils said they were allowed to bring anything except fizzy drinks.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. It has improved since the previous inspection and school records show that it has improved further since last year, when new strategies were established, including clearer guidance for rewards and sanctions.
- Almost all staff and most parents agree that the school makes sure that pupils behave well.
- Pupils generally behave well when learning and mostly listen well to their teachers, which helps them make good progress. They understand the systems for rewards and sanctions.
- Pupils behave and play together well in the playground. Pupils do not always respond

promptly, however, to the whistle at the end of playtime and some continue with their games. Nevertheless, once they are back in class they settle well and are ready to continue with their lessons.

- Sometimes behaviour is outstanding, as seen during a whole-school assembly, where pupils were fully engaged, interested and attentive.
- Attendance is below the national average despite leaders' best efforts to improve it. Leaders carefully check on the attendance of different groups and work hard to promote regular attendance. However, the proportion of pupils who are frequently absent is higher than that found nationally and they miss out on important learning.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' work in their books and the school's information about progress show that pupils currently in the school made good progress overall last year from their different starting points in reading, writing and mathematics. This reflects a continuing improving picture of achievement since the previous inspection.
- In 2015, pupils in Year 2 reached standards that were broadly in line with those found nationally. This was a marked improvement from the previous two years, when standards were significantly below average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- By the end of Year 6 in 2015, there was a considerable improvement from previous years and, although attainment remained below average, the school stemmed a legacy of significant underachievement.
- In 2016 at the end of key stage 1, most pupils reached the expected standard in the national assessments and the proportions were higher than the as yet unvalidated and provisional figures found nationally. The proportion working at a greater depth was also above the provisional national figures.
- By the end of key stage 2 in 2016, writing was a strength as most pupils met the expected standard. A large majority met the expected standard in mathematics and grammar, punctuation and spelling and a majority did in reading. The proportion working at a greater depth was in line with the unvalidated national average in writing, above in reading and grammar, punctuation and spelling and below in mathematics.
- In other years, school information and pupils work from last year typically shows that at least the large majority of pupils are working at the expected level or at greater depth.
- Pupils' progress is good from their starting points, although there is a little variation across different classes, which is linked to a few inconsistencies within the overall picture of typically good teaching and learning.
- The difference between the performance of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally is diminishing over time. This is a result of strong leadership, which ensures the effective use of the pupil premium funding. Barriers to learning are reduced by a successful range of strategies, including, for example, attendance at a summer club run by staff. Careful and detailed checks make sure that additional support is making a difference for pupils. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are making similar expected progress to their peers and the most able disadvantaged pupils generally make better than expected progress. Leaders are acutely aware, however, that more needs to be

done to fully eradicate differences in attainment when compared to other pupils nationally.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported. This group includes a number of pupils who are also disadvantaged. In previous years, provision for this group has been less successful and senior leaders correctly identified that they were not always making the progress of which they were capable. As a result, the leadership has reviewed and revised the systems, which are now carefully monitored. Class teachers are held to account for the achievement of these pupils. Frequent and careful checks on their progress enable small gains in learning to be accurately identified so that teaching is targeted to help them achieve their next steps. Additional support and specialist teaching has helped to accelerate pupils' progress, which is now sometimes in line with their peers.
- Pupils' work shows that they are generally making good progress across a wide range of subjects, including science, history, computing, art and design and food technology. However, as with English and mathematics, progress is a little uneven across different classes as expectations are not always consistently high enough.
- In English and mathematics, the most able pupils are generally challenged well to deepen their understanding and extend their thinking effectively.
- Standards in spelling are not high enough. Pupils often misspell common words, which go unchecked, and so errors are repeated over time.
- Over the last three years, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check has been steadily increasing and in 2015 and 2016 it was above the national figure, considerably so in 2016. Pupils use their phonics skills well to help them read unfamiliar words. As they progress, they develop a range of strategies to help them read and make sense of what they are reading. Readers of all abilities confidently spoke about their likes and dislikes as readers and gave considered reasons for their opinions.

Early years provision

Good

- Children start in the early years with skills and knowledge that are generally typical for their age. However, this does vary from year to year and is often lower in reading and writing.
- They make good and sometimes very rapid progress in the Nursery and Reception classes and are well prepared to continue with their learning in Year 1. Strong and highly effective leadership of the early years has a very positive impact on the improving outcomes and the quality of the provision.
- In 2015, the proportion of children that reached a good level of development was above that found nationally and in 2016 it was even higher. However, there remained considerable gaps between the achievement of boys and girls in reading, writing and mathematical development, where boys lagged behind girls.
- Topics, role play and resources are provided to appeal to all children and boys in particular to help improve their achievement to be more in line with girls. The leader has correctly identified that this is a continuing focus.
- Teaching, learning and assessment in the early years are good. Activities are planned

that capture the interest and the imagination of the children so they are engaged and fascinated and want to explore and learn. Children were totally engrossed in preparing plates of food with tissue paper for Dave the Minion's birthday party. Others thoroughly enjoyed their time in the Forest School, making a Minion with leaves and sticks.

- Staff usually promote children's confidence and independence very effectively. For example, most were able to change out of their wellingtons without any help. On occasion, adults intervene a little too quickly rather than let children solve problems for themselves. Assessment is used well to plan next steps for learning and to note milestones in children's development. A record of their achievements at school and at home is made throughout the year.
- There is a strong staff team and a good ratio between adults and children. This helps staff to get to know the children really well and meet individual needs very successfully. The children in the Nursery and Reception showed outstanding levels of engagement and confidence, particularly as they had only been in their classes for a short amount of time. They settle extremely well into the routines of the day and are happy and excited to learn. One child said, 'I love coming to Nursery, the best thing is playing with some toys.' Children behave exceptionally well and quickly learn to share and cooperate with each other.
- There are excellent procedures to get to know children and their families before they start at school. Excellent relationships with parents ensure that they are well informed about their children's progress and can work in partnership with the school to support children's learning. One parent summed up the views of many with the comment, 'The transition into Reception has been outstanding, with regular play sessions, story sessions, home visits and information meetings.'
- Children learn very effectively in stimulating, safe and secure environments. There is a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. Staff ensure that all safeguarding and welfare requirements appropriate to this age group are met. They ensure that children are kept safe and learn how to keep themselves safe. All the necessary actions are taken to support any child whose circumstances may make them vulnerable, including disadvantaged children and children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

School details

Unique reference number	139310
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10019915

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	465
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Belinda Stuart-Moonlight
Principal	Trevor North
Telephone number	01303251390
Website	www.stmarysfolkestone.com
Email address	headteacher@st-marys-folkestone.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 September 2014

Information about this school

- St Mary's is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium funding is above average.
- Children in the nursery attend part time.
- The school provides a daily breakfast club.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with DfE guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 32 lessons to observe pupils' learning in all classes across the school. Many of these observations were conducted jointly with the principal or deputy principal.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their work and looked at work in pupils' books.
- Inspectors observed pupils at playtime and lunchtime and in assemblies and asked them for their views on the school. They also talked to pupils about reading and listened to some pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the principal, the deputy principal, the CEO of the academy and other staff with key leadership responsibilities.
- Discussions were held with governors.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, including: the school's own check on its performance and the quality of teaching; the school improvement plan; information on pupils' progress; and records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.
- Inspectors looked at the 30 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, which included 21 written comments, and spoke with parents during the school day. They also took account of 38 questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

Margaret Coussins, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Reid	Ofsted Inspector
Rosemary Keen	Ofsted Inspector

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