

St Stephen's (Tonbridge) Primary School

Royal Rise, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 2DQ

Inspection dates

13–14 September 2016

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have not secured the improvements necessary to ensure that pupils achieve well.
- The headteacher has not communicated her vision for the school clearly enough to the school community. Too many parents lack confidence in the school's work.
- Weaknesses in school development planning hinder the pace of improvement in the school.
- Subject leaders are not clear about their role in the school's development.
- The governing body does not hold leaders sufficiently to account for the use of pupil premium funding or for pupils' outcomes.
- Pupils do not attend school regularly enough. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities attend too infrequently to enable them to achieve their best.
- Teaching over time does not ensure that pupils achieve well in English, mathematics and other subjects. Teachers do not use assessment information well enough to plan learning.
- Key groups, including disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the most able, underachieve.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour are too low. The work set for pupils does not extend learning and understanding well enough, including for the most able.
- Pupils' learning is disrupted too often by the poor behaviour of their classmates.
- Children in the early years do not make sufficiently rapid progress. However, they make better progress than pupils in other year groups.

The school has the following strengths

- The early years leader has secured improvements in the quality of teaching and in children's progress over the past year.
- The headteacher and governors ensure that all staff and governors are up to date with safeguarding procedures so that pupils are safe in school.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, achieve well, by ensuring that:
 - teaching builds strongly on what pupils know and understand in reading, writing and mathematics
 - teachers have the highest expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour so no learning time is lost during lessons due to poor behaviour.
- Improve leadership and management at all levels by ensuring that:
 - the headteacher communicates her ambitions and aspirations for the school's future clearly to all members of the school community
 - leaders implement robust, effective procedures for checking all aspects of the school's work, focusing on pupils' achievement
 - all members of staff, including subject leaders, are clear about the priorities for school development and about their roles in improving the school's performance
 - governors hold leaders to account effectively for pupils' achievement, including the achievement of disadvantaged pupils
 - pupil premium funding is used effectively so that disadvantaged pupils achieve their full potential
 - communications with parents are improved.
- Improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and raise overall attendance rates.
- Accelerate disadvantaged children's progress in the early years by making sure that adults are alert and responsive to children's social and learning needs.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- The headteacher has not been clear about the school's direction or about the priorities for improvement. Development plans lack precision and rigour and are not sufficiently understood by all members of staff. As a result, teachers', governors' and subject leaders' efforts to improve pupils' outcomes have been frustrated.
- Senior leaders have not secured the highest expectations and aspirations for all pupils across the school. There are too many variations in the way adults respond to pupils' misbehaviour.
- Leaders have not ensured that all groups of pupils achieve sufficiently well. Intermittent and fragile improvements in the school since the previous inspection have been insufficient to ensure that all groups of pupils achieve their potential.
- The school lacks a sense of urgency about securing the necessary improvements to ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed. Checks on improvements in the school and on pupils' progress lack rigour. Senior leaders and governors have an inaccurate and overly generous view of the school's success.
- The leadership of teaching is inadequate. Teachers have not been given sufficient training to ensure that they teach subjects effectively, including phonics and reading skills. Teachers do not have sufficient information about pupils' starting points at the start of the academic year to enable them to plan learning well.
- The performance management of staff is ineffective because it has not secured the necessary improvements in teaching. Small improvements made to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment since the previous inspection have not been sustained.
- The recently appointed subject leaders are passionate about their areas of responsibility and keen to play a part in the school's development. However, they are at an early stage in developing their roles. They lack support and direction from senior leaders and are unclear about the most important priorities for improving pupils' learning.
- The local authority has provided considerable support for the school since the previous inspection. However, the headteacher and other leaders have not used guidance effectively, so that groups of pupils continue to underachieve.
- The majority of parents who completed the online questionnaire, and almost all of those who spoke informally to inspectors, expressed concerns about the school's leadership and management. More than half would not recommend the school. Many parents commented on poor communication between the school and parents. A number of parents told inspectors that they feel leaders are not interested in their views.
- The curriculum is inadequate. While leaders ensure that pupils learn a broad and balanced range of subjects, the content is not sufficiently challenging. A range of clubs, such as science and drama clubs, give pupils the opportunity to pursue particular interests.
- Pupils learn about a range of world religions including Christianity, Islam and Hinduism and understand that people have different beliefs. However, some are inattentive and

disrespectful during assemblies and this detracts from the spiritual ethos of such occasions.

- Leaders have introduced steps to increase pupils' appreciation of British values. For example, pupils learn about democratic systems and put this into practice when voting for the house captains, head boy and head girl. The head girl and deputy head girl spoke to inspectors with pride about giving a speech to the whole school, knowing that what they said would help their peers to decide how to vote. However, while these pupils are clearly benefiting from their experiences, this is not the case more generally. Low attendance and underachievement mean that many pupils are poorly prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The sports leader uses the sport premium effectively to increase pupils' activity and fitness levels, with a particular focus on improving disadvantaged pupils' well-being. For example, she has used funding to provide a wider range of sports clubs, leading to an increase in the number of pupils participating. New football and netball kits have enhanced pupils' sense of identity and pride when participating in competitions and tournaments.
- Specialist sports coaches have worked with teachers to help them to teach aspects of physical education more confidently. As a result, pupils make better progress in developing sports skills. The sports leader regularly reviews the use of funds to make sure that developments are on track and to identify the next steps in development.
- Newly qualified teachers may not be appointed.

Governance of the school

- The governing body lacks confidence in the school leadership's capacity to secure the necessary improvements. The recently appointed chair of governors recognises that expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour have been too low for some time, including for disadvantaged pupils and the most able pupils. He also knows that the pace of improvement in the school has been too slow.
- Governors' understanding about the key issues for school improvement and about pupils' outcomes is hindered by the lack of key information from school leaders. For example, they do not have sufficient detail about whether developments in the school are on track and whether these have brought about enough improvement in pupils' outcomes.
- Governors do not check the school's work adequately. They do not question or challenge leaders sharply enough about the school's poor performance.
- Governors do not have a sufficiently clear view of how leaders use additional funding, or the difference this is making to disadvantaged pupils' progress. For example, they measure disadvantaged pupils' achievement against other pupils in the school who are also underperforming, rather than others nationally. This has permitted low expectations to go unchallenged.
- The governing body has not ensured that pupil premium funding is used effectively to secure disadvantaged pupils' regular attendance.
- Governors are not sufficiently aware of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school and the impact this has had on pupils' learning in each year group and in different subjects. However, they are clearer about children's progress during Reception Year, including that of disadvantaged children, because the early years leadership is better than in the rest of the school.

- Numerous changes in the governing body mean that a number of governors, including the chair of governors, are new to their roles and at an early understanding of their responsibilities. While they are committed and determined to secure the necessary improvements in the school, they are unsure about how to gain an accurate and realistic view of teaching and learning.
- Recent training has alerted governors to some of the steps they can take to check the school's work more robustly. For example, the chair of governors is more confident about requesting information contained in the headteacher's reports in a more accessible format for governors' use. However, plans for improvement are at an early stage.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Senior leaders have made sure that all staff and governors have an up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding policies and procedures. Teachers and other members of staff speak confidently about what they would do if they had a safeguarding concern. Recruitment checks are well organised and complete.
- Governors understand their responsibilities for ensuring pupils' safety. They are well informed about some of the potential risks to pupils' well-being, including extremism and radicalisation. All governors have attended appropriate training.
- The school site is well maintained and orderly, including the early years areas. Secure perimeter fencing, attentive staff and security measures at all entrances ensure that pupils are safe.
- Staff in the breakfast and after-school clubs ensure that safeguarding procedures are rigorously followed. For example, adults make sure that pupils are signed in and out of each club. Members of staff are clear about the school's safeguarding procedures and know how to report concerns. They have completed relevant safeguarding training and are well informed about the most recent safeguarding guidance. They are well qualified in child protection, first aid and food hygiene. The clubs have been awarded five stars for food handling and hygiene.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The impact of teaching on pupils' learning over time is inadequate. Teaching does not ensure that pupils make sufficient progress.
- Significant weaknesses in teaching have resulted in substantial gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers describe how this hampers their work because they need to spend time covering fundamental aspects of literacy and numeracy which pupils should have secured at a much earlier stage in their education. For example, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson, pupils of differing abilities were completing low-level work to ensure that they understood how to round to the nearest ten.
- Teachers' responses to misbehaviour are too variable, leading to considerable differences in the quality of behaviour and learning between classes. This makes it difficult for those teachers who are working hard to improve behaviour because they have to repeatedly reassert expectations.

- Most teachers do not use the limited information available about pupils' needs well enough to move learning forward briskly. The work that teachers set does not deepen and extend pupils' learning and understanding sufficiently. This is particularly the case for the most able pupils.
- Phonics teaching does not equip pupils with the basic reading and writing skills essential for success in English. There are wide variations in the quality of phonics teaching between different classes. Some do not address misconceptions well enough during lessons to ensure that pupils make secure and rapid progress.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils' writing are too low. Often, teachers do not insist that pupils follow fundamental punctuation rules, such as using capital letters for people's names.
- The quality of support provided by teaching assistants is too variable. In too many cases, teaching assistants' expectations, like those of teachers, are low. For example, some provide too much support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a result, pupils do not learn how to work independently.
- Some teaching assistants provide good-quality, knowledgeable help for pupils. For example, during the inspection a teaching assistant responsible for supporting pupils who speak English as an additional language skilfully and sensitively evaluated pupils' needs in several year groups. Her discussion with a child in the Reception Year illustrated her high expectations, as she gently explored the child's knowledge and understanding of numbers up to 10 and beyond.
- The teaching of handwriting has improved over the past year. Teachers consistently follow the school's handwriting policy. They increasingly expect pupils to complete written work clearly and neatly.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Pupils' attendance has been low for several years, with a further decline in 2016. Disadvantaged pupils' attendance is much lower than that of other pupils nationally and declined further in 2016. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities attend too infrequently to achieve well.
- While overall rates of persistent absenteeism were in line with national averages in 2015, the proportions of disadvantaged pupils who were persistently absent was much higher. It was a similarly weak picture for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The large majority of parents who completed the online questionnaire felt that pupils were safe in school and inspectors noted improvements in this aspect of the school's work over the past year. As a result, pupils feel safe. For example, the recent focus on improving pupils' understanding of bullying has been successful. Pupils know what bullying is, the different forms it can take and why it is harmful. They speak confidently about what they should do if they are worried. They say that teachers and leaders take their concerns seriously and respond quickly.
- Records show that school leaders have improved their response to bullying incidents over the past year. The appointment of a parent support worker has strengthened this

aspect of the school's work. She knows pupils well and has made a good start in establishing links with parents.

- The breakfast and after-school clubs provide secure and enjoyable places for pupils to relax and chat with their friends. Pupils join in with a range of activities and behave well. Adults are caring and good-humoured. They value what pupils have to say and give safeguarding a high priority. This is reflected in one pupil's comment: 'The club is fun. The other children are friendly and I can rely on the teachers to look after me.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate. Teachers and senior leaders do not manage pupils' behaviour well enough.
- The quality of pupils' behaviour in lessons varies widely. Although some pupils enjoy learning and want to do well, this is not consistent across all classes. Too many pupils have negative attitudes to school and are disrespectful towards members of staff. They chat while the teacher talks and ignore requests to get on with their work. Pupils say that misbehaviour regularly disturbs their learning – a view confirmed by inspectors' observations of behaviour and learning during the inspection.
- While most pupils are kind to each other and behave well during playtimes, some are slow to respond to teachers at the end of playtimes. This delays the return to classrooms so that learning time is lost.
- Approximately half of those parents who responded to the online questionnaire, and most of those who spoke with inspectors during the inspection, expressed concerns about pupils' behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Pupils currently in the school do not make sufficiently rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Marked differences between pupils' outcomes and others nationally mean that they are not well prepared for the next stage of their education by the end of Year 6.
- Too few pupils achieved expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics in 2016.
- The work in pupils' books indicates substantial gaps in pupils' literacy and numeracy skills which hamper their progress in subjects across the curriculum.
- Slow progress during key stage 1 means that the most able pupils have much ground to cover during key stage 2 to achieve well at the end of Year 6. However, teaching during key stage 2 is not strong enough to ensure that this happens, with too much left to be done in Year 6.
- The proportions of pupils achieving the highest levels of attainment have steadily declined since the previous inspection. In 2016, no Year 6 pupils achieved a high score in reading, writing or mathematics.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make insufficient progress. Teachers and leaders are slow to identify pupils' additional needs and to check that extra help is making a difference.
- Pupils do not acquire reading skills well enough. Too many pupils are unsure what to do if they get stuck because they have not learned how to use phonics strategies successfully. Some of the most able pupils struggle to interpret straightforward texts.

- The proportions of pupils achieving expected levels in the Year 1 phonics check were lower than the national average in 2015, including for disadvantaged pupils. The proportions declined in 2016.
- Pupils' written work is underdeveloped. Too often pupils' work contains unnecessary spelling and punctuation errors which are not addressed properly by their teachers.
- Pupils' learning in mathematics lacks depth. Pupils in some year groups, including Year 1 and Year 6, are making better progress than in previous years because teachers are focusing their teaching more precisely on the gaps in pupils' learning. However, low standards at the start of each year put all pupils at an academic disadvantage. Pupils do not make sufficiently rapid progress to catch up with where they need to be and to achieve well.
- While the teaching of science gives pupils a basic grasp of scientific knowledge and understanding, the standard of work is too low. For example, pupils' science work on topics such as 'the teeth' indicates that pupils are developing a knowledge of key scientific vocabulary, such as the names of different types of teeth and their functions. However, pupils do not make sufficiently fast progress to achieve their full potential.
- Pupils' handwriting has improved over the past year. While some still struggle, many use a more consistent handwriting style. As a result, they write more quickly and fluently than before and the presentation of their work has improved considerably.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- It is too soon for the recently appointed early years leader to have secured children's consistently good progress, including disadvantaged children.
- There are variations in adults' expectations of children's learning. Sometimes activities in the early years are not challenging enough to ensure that children make sufficiently rapid progress, particularly the most able children. For example, during the inspection a group of children thoroughly enjoyed using giant blocks to build an aeroplane. They shared tools, discussed how they could overcome problems and helped each other to improve their model. However, adults' comments and questions did not explore or extend children's understanding fully enough.
- During the course of the past year, the previous early years leader, working alongside the current early years leader, secured improvements in teaching. For example, she strengthened the focus on learning through play, particularly in the outdoor area, by improving the quality of activities. As a result, children in the early years make better progress than pupils in other year groups. The overall proportion of children achieving a good level of development has been broadly in line with the national average for the past two years.
- Improvements in teaching since the previous inspection ensure that children are increasingly well prepared with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to learn well in Year 1. A sharper focus on the needs of disadvantaged children since the previous inspection led to an increase in the proportion achieving a good level of development in 2016.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are caring and attentive. They get to know the children well, making sure they are safe and secure. Children get on well with each other and behave well. During the inspection children happily and confidently joined in with activities, chatting comfortably with adults.

- Leaders have established effective procedures for children starting school. For example, they provide taster sessions for small groups of children and information booklets for parents. As a result, children settle quickly and securely. One parent commented that she was pleased with the way her child had settled into school.
- The current early years leader has made a good start in her new role this year. She has established herself well with parents and staff, and is clearly respected by her colleagues in other year groups. She is keen to make further improvements in the quality of provision so that activities build consistently well on children's learning.

School details

Unique reference number	118578
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10012300

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	188
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Thomas
Headteacher	Clare Escombe
Telephone number	01732 354 143
Website	www.st-stephens-school-tonbridge.com/
Email address	headteacher@st-stephens-tonbridge.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 July 2014

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average primary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is higher than 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 children who are looked after.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is lower than the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school provides full-time early years provision in the Reception class.
- The school operates a breakfast club and an after-school club on the school premises. Both were included in this inspection.

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed learning in 11 lessons or part-lessons, including three observed jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspection team held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, a local authority representative, the head of services in the local authority, teachers, members of staff, parents and pupils. A meeting also took place with the chair of the governing body and one other governor.
- The inspection team took account of the 26 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. In addition, inspectors considered the views expressed by parents who spoke with them informally during the school day.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and considered a range of documents, including the improvement plan, information about pupils' progress and attendance, 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 2 and Year 6 reading.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Francois Walker

Ofsted Inspector

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