

St Mary's Church of England (VC) J and I School

Mill Bank, Sowerby Bridge, West Yorkshire HX6 3EJ

Inspection dates

7–8 February 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher leads the school with an absolute conviction that all pupils can and will succeed. He has developed and leads a strong team of staff who all share this view.
- The headteacher has a very detailed knowledge of the school, its pupils, staff and community. He is approachable and highly regarded by staff, pupils and parents.
- The school offers its pupils a rich and varied curriculum that is most expertly and imaginatively taught by staff who are constantly seeking to improve.
- Across the school, pupils make outstanding progress in English and mathematics. They are also very successful in the wider curriculum. There are significant strengths in science, religious education and art.
- Pupils are impeccably behaved. They love coming to school. They thrive on the rich diet of learning, challenge and care that the school provides. Pupils are very polite, kind and aware of the needs of others. They are very well prepared for their next steps. Attendance is consistently above the national average.
- Staff, both teachers and teaching assistants, check pupils' progress regularly and rigorously so that teaching is carefully focused on what pupils need to do to make rapid progress.
- The governing body has a very clear view about its strategic role. It balances this with detailed knowledge of the school and its role in the community. As a result, governors are very capable and effective in holding the headteacher to account.
- Leaders make sure that safeguarding arrangements are effective and that all the necessary procedures are in place and rigorously applied. Pupils feel safe. All staff are carefully and regularly trained to keep them up to date in how to keep children and pupils safe.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress. This is because their needs are accurately identified and teaching is adapted so that they make the best progress possible.
- Pupils' development and well-being are very well supported and pupils are taught to be considerate and confident. High-quality provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development supports this.
- The early years provision is very well led. Teaching is outstanding. Children are safe and happy and their well-being is nurtured carefully. This approach gets children off to a flying start in their school careers.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Add even more to the school's curriculum so that it further extends and develops pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher is driven by the conviction that every child can and should do well. He works in partnership with parents, governors and his team of staff to make this happen.
- Leaders and governors have created a culture of excellence at the school. This is sustained through consistent and rigorous checking systems, focused support and training and, above all, on an insistence on the highest expectations for all.
- Leaders and governors know the school, its pupils, families and community very well. They use their detailed insights to ensure that the school not only provides an outstanding education for the children, but that it also serves its community. Parents welcome both the outstanding education and the close links between the school and the community.
- The headteacher and governors manage the performance of staff very effectively to drive up standards. Staff targets are simple yet rigorous. They are focused on improving the outcomes and well-being of children. The impact of staff actions on improving pupils' progress is regularly checked through conversations and a range of thorough and detailed visits and scrutiny of pupils' work.
- St Mary's staff are constantly seeking to improve. Led by the headteacher, there is constant discussion about how best to refine and focus teaching and learning so that all pupils do well. Staff work well together and are robust in their assessment of each other's work. Staff at the school collaborate closely with other schools in the area to check and improve the accuracy of assessments. As a result of this determination to improve, pupils make excellent progress.
- The curriculum at the school is broad, balanced and interesting. It is underpinned by a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and sports opportunities. Pupils enjoy and gain much from the range and variety of their experiences in learning. They also welcome the opportunities they are offered to develop as leaders and organisers of charity and other events. Occasionally, opportunities are missed to allow pupils to engage in deeper research.
- Pupil premium funding is used very expertly by leaders and governors to ensure that barriers to learning are, as far as possible, removed. As a result, disadvantaged pupils do as well, if not better, than their peers at the school. Similarly, the school uses its allocation of physical education (PE) funding most successfully to both give pupils opportunities to extend their sports skills and experience and to develop existing staff's expertise in teaching PE.
- The school is very effective in developing pupils' understanding of themselves as spiritual beings working within a moral framework. The school offers many opportunities for pupils to develop this sense of self in the service of others, whether through voluntary and charity work or during times of reflection in daily acts of worship.

- Parents hold the school and its leadership in very high regard. Parents particularly commented on the expertise and commitment of staff to their children’s learning and safety. They also spoke of open and regular communication and the way the school’s role in the community had developed under the present headteacher.

Governance of the school

- The governance at of the school is dynamic, strategic and detailed. Governors are committed to improving their skills through regular training. They visit the school regularly to support its work. As a result, they are able to ask challenging questions of leaders in order to check that the school maintains and further develops its high standards.
- Governors take an active role in creating the school’s plans for development. Working with the headteacher, they meet specifically to set out the vision for the school and discuss these plans and assure their impact. The school’s current plan, ‘freedom to fly’, is rooted in ensuring that pupils have a passion for learning, know how to successfully work in partnership and develop as caring, confident individuals aware of the needs of others.
- Governors use external consultants effectively to check and improve the quality of their work. For example, the school’s improvement partner meets with the full governing body for a session before each scheduled meeting to improve governors’ skills and to give them independent insights into how well the school is doing.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. A culture of safeguarding pervades the school. Leaders and governors see safeguarding as their paramount responsibility. Members of staff receive regular safeguarding training to make sure that this priority remains at the forefront of the school’s work.
- The school’s systems and checks are fit for purpose, systematically maintained and checked and regularly scrutinised by governors. There are robust procedures in place for the recording and reporting of any concerns that arise.
- All staff know all the pupils very well. As a result, pupils are surrounded by trusted adults to whom they can turn for help. Staff communicate and meet with parents regularly on matters to do with their children’s safety and well-being. Parents welcome this. They speak very highly of the lengths the school goes to in order to ensure that their children are safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Staff at the school, both teachers and teaching assistants, have consistently high expectations and excellent subject knowledge. They are determined that all pupils will do well. They fire pupils with their enthusiasm and genuine engagement with learning. Pupils rise enthusiastically to this level of challenge.

- Staff have established very clear and effective learning routines and a culture of enquiry in each class and across the school. These routines are rooted in the school's ethos of care and challenge. As a result, children are very clear about what is expected of them.
- Staff have a very thorough knowledge of the subjects they teach. As a result, they use careful, insistent and probing questions very effectively to broaden and deepen pupils' knowledge and skills. They make pupils think. As a result, pupils learn to ask themselves challenging questions.
- Staff very regularly check on the progress that pupils are making to gauge how well they are doing, identify who may be falling behind and to help inform next steps in teaching and learning. Staff assure the accuracy of their assessments by sharing and testing their judgements with other members of staff and with other schools. As a result, the school's assessments of pupils' progress and its predictions of how well they will do are accurate.
- Pupils have many opportunities to write in different styles to suit a wide range of purposes. They thoroughly enjoy this. All pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are expected to write in a neat, cursive script. They write to develop their ideas and to explore and deepen their learning. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to write at length in the full range of subjects, including in religious education and science. As they mature as learners they learn to use the appropriate language in their writing that suits the needs of the subject. In science, for example, they learn to record and analyse events during experiments and then present their findings, using written description, diagrams and data appropriately.
- Staff, led by the headteacher, seek innovative and exciting ways to extend learning. For example, there are regular opportunities where the whole school focuses on a particular topic for a week. Events such as 'Science and maths week' and 'Decades week' gave pupils opportunities to explore a topic in depth across the whole school and the whole curriculum. These focused times engaged and enthralled pupils and helped them see learning in a new light.
- The teaching of mathematics is excellent. Pupils enjoy the many opportunities that staff give them to deepen their mathematical thinking through 'open-ended' problems that require the mastery of a wide range of mathematical skills. Pupils' joy in exploring mathematics, especially that of the most able, is shown in the enthusiasm with which they speak about mathematics and also the remarkable amount of work in their mathematics books.
- Teaching of reading is most effective and instils in pupils a thirst for reading. From the Reception class onwards, books are readily available and reading is encouraged and enjoyed. Teachers set time aside for regular reading sessions with a focus on developing and deepening their skills as readers of a wide range of writing in prose, poetry, fiction and non-fiction.
- Staff help pupils develop resilience as learners. Pupils speak confidently and are keen to discuss not only their own learning, but explore new ideas. For example, during a discussion about the influence that the Vikings have had on our heritage, pupils took delight in the relationship between Norse gods and the days of the week and why it's Woden's fault that 'Wednesday' is so hard to spell.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are confident, self-assured and sensitive to the needs of others. They are very proud of their school and wear their uniform smartly. Attitudes to learning are excellent. All pupils want to learn and improve because of the dedicated teaching and care they receive from staff at the school.
- The school creates a secure environment where pupils are able to thrive and learn. Pupils are encouraged to explore ideas and challenge stereotypes. They are open, friendly and kind.
- Pupils reported that there is no bullying at the school. Inspection findings show that incidents of bullying are very rare. Pupils are very clear about the forms that bullying can take. They said that if they felt unhappy or bullied they would tell an adult at the school. Pupils reported that they were very confident that staff would 'sort it out'.
- Pupils are very well informed about how to keep themselves safe at school and when out and about in the community. They also know how to keep safe online. This is because the school runs regular carefully planned sessions, often including outside speakers, to help ensure that pupils are well equipped to deal with the increasingly complex world they inhabit.
- Pupils are encouraged to act as supports and 'buddies' to other pupils. This can take the form of older pupils supporting younger pupils at playtimes or Year 6 pupils helping new Reception children settle into the school.
- Pupils who, from time to time, need additional support are very well cared for and supported by the school. The headteacher has put in place very rigorous systems, rooted in clear moral purpose, to help ensure that any barriers to the learning and well-being of pupils are overcome.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves healthy and adopt healthy lifestyles. School meals are nutritious and well balanced. Pupils are well aware of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are confident, self-assured and sensitive to the needs of others.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning. All pupils want to learn and improve because of dedicated teaching and care they receive from staff at the school. As one pupil wrote in a note to the inspector, 'We get challenged in every subject so we never find it easy at this school'.
- Pupils love coming to school. They are rarely away. Attendance is above the national average for all pupils.

- From the Reception class onwards, children and pupils talk with confidence and real enthusiasm about their learning. They can talk articulately about learning experiences that range widely from Viking artefacts, to David Hockney, to chocolate chip cookie recipes.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Inspection evidence shows that throughout each year group and across all subjects, pupils make sustained and substantial progress from their starting points. This is because they are taught extremely effectively and are eager to learn.
- The proportions of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stages 1 and 2 in 2016 were above the national average.
- The additional focus on writing and the school-wide introduction of a cursive script that has taken place over the last six months has had a very substantial, positive impact on raising pupils' confidence and facility with writing. Pupils' books across the whole range of subjects in the curriculum are well presented and show evidence of accurate writing at length using subject-specific vocabulary. They also show pupils writing accurately and with confidence in a wide range of styles and genres to suit a range of audiences.
- Disadvantaged pupils do well and often better than their peers. This is because staff and leaders use their very detailed knowledge to focus on areas of strength and remove, wherever possible, barriers to learning.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities also make excellent progress from their starting points. Staff focus their support very successfully to help pupils overcome their specific difficulties. Consequently, additional funding is used extremely well.
- Pupils make excellent progress in a range of subjects. In science, for example, scrutiny of workbooks showed that pupils learn a range of scientific skills: how to investigate, set out their findings and draw clear, accurate tables and diagrams.
- Pupils are very well prepared for their next steps. Year 6 pupils show an eagerness and a real thirst for knowledge. The sophistication and depth of their knowledge across the curriculum and their self-confident joy in learning mean that they should get off to a flying start at secondary school.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- The leadership of the early years provision is imaginative, skilled and very strong.
- The leader ensures that the team is very carefully and effectively trained and deployed. Staff know the children very well. Information about children is gathered rigorously and used very effectively to inform teaching and appropriate and stimulating activities. The leader effectively checks the accuracy of judgements about children's progress through regular meetings within school and meetings with two other good local schools, Ripponden Junior and Infant, and Sacred Heart Catholic Primary.

- Children join the early years provision with variable levels of skills. They make high rates of progress and are extremely well prepared academically and socially for the next stage of their education. The 2016 assessments show that 80% of children in Reception reached a good level of development.
- Children settle well into the Reception class because the transition arrangements focus on ensuring that children make a flying start when they enter the Reception Year. The early years leader uses knowledge of the partner nursery settings very well. She reduces both parents' and children's potential anxiety about starting school through a range of imaginative and effective strategies. For example, each new Reception child has a trained 'buddy', who is an older member of the school. This older pupil is on hand to support the newcomer as they settle into the school and its learning routines.
- Safeguarding is effective in the Reception class. Children feel safe and are safe. The systems, policies and checks that help ensure that children are safe are rigorously applied. The children are very well behaved and kind to each other. They learn together well, taking turns and learning the value of collaboration and sharing.
- Teaching in early years is outstanding. Staff prepare very carefully and focus on what children need to make rapid progress. Children learn in a stimulating environment which is lively, engaging and suited to the needs of the children's development and well-being.
- Links with parents are strong. Parents reported that they were very pleased with the early years provision and the way their children had settled and were learning. They also welcomed the regular updates they have on their children's progress and the very detailed, open and easy communications with the school.

School details

Unique reference number	107538
Local authority	Calderdale
Inspection number	10023894

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Walker
Headteacher	Matthew Hopkins
Telephone number	01422 823353
Website	www.st-marys.calderdale.sch.uk
Email address	head@st-marys.calderdale.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	16–17 May 2012

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior and Infant School is smaller than the average primary school, and is catering for a community that is largely White British.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school is below average. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is also below average.
- There is 'wrap-around' provision available on the school site from 7.30am in the morning until 6pm in the evening.

- The headteacher is the chair of the 14-strong local 'cluster' of schools. The schools in the cluster, supported by Calderdale local authority, work with each other in areas such as checking the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' work and delivering training.
- The early years provision at St Mary's works with Ripponden Junior and Infant School and Sacred Heart Catholic Voluntary Academy, both local good schools, to help assure standards and high-quality early years provision. Along with St Mary's, these schools make up the Sowerby Bridge Triad.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classes and some small groups. Almost all of these observations were undertaken jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, a group of staff and a group of pupils. Two meetings were held with groups of governors and a meeting was held with the school's improvement partners. The inspector also held a telephone conversation with a local authority officer.
- The inspector observed pupils during two acts of collective worship, on the playground and at lunchtime. He considered the views of parents through the 52 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and through meetings with parents at the start and end of the school days.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding, pupils' outcomes, the school's curriculum and the work of governors.

Inspection team

Mark Evans, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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