

Tolleshunt D'Arcy St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Tollesbury Road, Tolleshunt D'Arcy, Maldon, Essex CM9 8UB

Inspection dates

7–8 March 2018

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

- The executive headteacher and head of school share high expectations and a clear understanding of what constitutes effective teaching and learning. They lead with drive and rigour. The partnering of this school with a local primary academy has been instrumental in bringing about rapid school improvement.
- The headteacher is ably supported by an enthusiastic and increasingly capable staff who are making a significant contribution to improving pupils' learning.
- Governors have a vision for the school's development. They are knowledgeable, well informed and offer school leaders appropriate challenge and support.
- Parents and carers are positive about the school and recognise the improvements and rapid changes that have been made.
- Pupils behave well in their lessons. A consistent approach by all staff means that pupils always know what is expected of them throughout the school day.
- The school is maintained as a safe and secure environment. Pupils say that they feel safe and safeguarding procedures are effective.
- Children have a good start at school. They join Year 1 as confident and independent learners having made good progress in early years.
- Phonics teaching is good. Pupils use their understanding of letters and sounds effectively in their reading.
- Teachers and support staff are given excellent opportunities to develop their own practice. This means that the quality of provision for pupils is always improving.
- The historical underachievement of pupils is being addressed. A greater proportion of pupils are now working at the level expected for their age. However, in some year groups, pupils' outcomes in writing are not as strong as they are for reading and mathematics.
- The most able pupils do not yet routinely have their needs fully met and so are not consistently making as much progress as they could.
- Despite the work of leaders, which has had some effect, rates of absence and persistent absence remain above the national average.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to accelerate pupils' progress so that pupils make consistently strong progress throughout key stage 2, particularly in writing.
- Ensure that all work is appropriately resourced and challenging enough to enable the most able pupils make the progress of which they are capable.
- Continue work to improve attendance and further reduce the rate of persistent absence, ensuring that overall attendance is at least as good as the national average.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The partnership with a local academy and the installation of a new leadership team have been instrumental in raising standards and ensuring that current pupils now receive a good and improving education. The school's leaders have been single minded in pursuing their improvement strategy. They have been successful. Staff share their high expectations and, as a result, have worked hard to secure the changes that were necessary.
- A priority for parents and governors was to see stability introduced to the school's staffing arrangements. This has been achieved by seconding teachers and support staff from the partnering academy. These arrangements have created a strong and positive teaching team. Staff are proud to be members of the school and recognise the significant improvements that have been made.
- The executive headteacher has established a culture of high expectations throughout the school. This is shared by all. One pupil commented that the staff, 'believe in our abilities and make things as they are so we can do the best we can'. Governors have noted the increase in positive feedback they receive about the school from parents and the wider community.
- Leaders have put in place a considerable number of changes to address pupils' historic underachievement. The impact of these changes is evident in assessments, in pupils' workbooks and the pride pupils show in the way that they talk about their learning. New assessment and tracking arrangements enable leaders to accurately measure pupils' progress and ensure appropriate support for pupils.
- Leaders, through careful discussion and monitoring, evaluate the quality of teaching and learning accurately. They are aware of what needs to be done to bring about improvements. They put in place training, set targets and implement carefully considered systems of support. Teachers and support staff value the opportunities they are given to develop, and they understand how this has helped improve outcomes for pupils.
- New members of staff are well supported and receive a thorough induction. Their training needs are carefully considered and matched to the school's development priorities.
- The knowledgeable special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) ensures that the provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is appropriate and effective. A recent reorganisation of how pupils are supported resulted in many more opportunities for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities to be taught in class alongside their peers. The majority of these pupils make better progress as a result. They benefit from higher expectations and have decreased their dependence on adult support.
- Additional funding is used well to provide support for disadvantaged pupils. The school's leadership has a good understanding of the needs of this pupil group and any barriers to learning that may exist. The strategies developed by the school include

consideration of pupils' well-being alongside social circumstance and academic need. As a result, disadvantaged pupils are positive about learning and make good progress.

- Pupils enjoy physical activity. The school uses the physical education and sport premium grant to promote healthy lifestyles and to enable pupils to take part in inter-school sporting activities. The grant has also been used to employ additional coaches who offer professional development opportunities to staff and additional curriculum activities to pupils.
- The curriculum is arranged in such a way that the majority of learning takes place through a topic-led approach. Teachers provide a good range of opportunities and different learning experiences that excite and enthuse pupils. Subject leadership is developing, with a growing understanding of subject areas' strengths and weaknesses. This has led, for example, to improvements in the way that phonics and spelling are taught.
- The school's use of key values has secured a school-wide framework for the teaching of spiritual, moral, social and cultural values. In an assembly about Mothering Sunday, pupils were asked to consider the value of truthfulness. This is a good example of how the school's leadership team encourages positive approaches to living and working together, as well as reinforcing expectations of good behaviour and the promotion of British values.

Governance of the school

- An external review of governance and support from a local authority interim board have resulted in the governing body becoming more effective and purposeful. Governors have a clear vision for the direction of the school's development and were instrumental in creating the school's current partnership arrangement.
- Governors are strong at holding leaders and teachers to account. They regularly check performance data and have an informed view of the school's progress.
- Governors ensure that their statutory responsibilities, particularly in regard to safeguarding, are properly met and that systems are effective.
- The governing body is active in the life of the school. Governors monitor pupil and parent views as well as community perceptions. They recognise that the school's reputation is, rightly, growing.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's leadership has made sure that all staff understand their responsibilities regarding safeguarding. They are vigilant and proactive. Leaders work closely with parents, carers and other agencies, such as the support group Red Balloon, to ensure that pupils are kept safe.
- Leaders have ensured that appropriate training is in place. Record keeping is sufficiently detailed and up to date. Governors regularly check safeguarding procedures. Recruitment processes are secure and all statutory requirements are met.

- Pupils feel safe in school, the premises are maintained as a secure environment and pupils are appropriately supervised at all times. Bullying and discriminatory behaviour are very rare. Through direct teaching, pupils have a good understanding of issues such as online safety and the importance of mutual respect and tolerance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have high expectations of their pupils. They have established good relationships and, despite occasional challenges, ensure that their classrooms are well ordered and calm. All classrooms have effective teaching assistants who support pupils well. Pupils in the majority of year groups are making increasingly strong progress in their reading, writing and mathematics and applying this learning in other subjects.
- Phonics and spelling teaching is effective. Recent reorganisation means that pupils are taught in smaller groups and the teaching is much more closely matched to their needs. The teaching in these sessions makes good use of the resources available. Staff take care to check on what pupils have learned and follow up on misunderstandings. Pupils of all abilities make good progress.
- The quality of teaching in mathematics is good and improving. Teachers are checking pupils' understanding more carefully and identifying next steps for learning more accurately. Pupils are being encouraged to develop their reasoning skills as well as their fluency in calculations and knowing number facts. Pupils in key stage 2 are increasingly confident with more complex problem-solving activities.
- As a result of the reorganisation and training for the learning support staff, pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities and those who are disadvantaged learn well. Teaching assistants are knowledgeable and demonstrate a clear insight into the needs of those in their care.
- Teachers use good questioning and modelling techniques. In an English lesson, for example, pupils were able to develop their understanding of adjectival phrases and personification, which they later used to good effect in their writing.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to make learning interesting and exciting. In a key stage 2 computing lesson, for example, pupils used what they had learned about animal lifecycles in science to construct an electronic app. They were able to develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills in a practical way, while reinforcing their understanding of metamorphosis.
- The work in pupils' books shows that the majority are making consistent progress in learning about different topics, especially in subjects such as science, geography and history. In some independent science writing, pupils in Year 1 were able to sequence instructions for planting beans. Their work was punctuated using full stops and exclamation marks, their spelling was accurate and their handwriting neat. Attractive displays in the communal areas of the school show the range and depth of pupils' work in their topic themes.
- Where writing is taught most effectively, pupils have clear success criteria to measure their progress against and teachers are able to assess with accuracy and give constructive feedback. However, pupils do not always have sufficient time in lessons to

produce pieces of sustained writing. The most able pupils in particular do not have the opportunity to develop their higher level writing skills.

- Reading is improving because of changes in the way that it is taught. Pupils in Year 1 use their phonic knowledge well in their reading. Pupils in key stage 2 read with accuracy and real pleasure. However, progress for the most able pupils is limited because they are given insufficiently challenging books in key stage 1 and there is a lack of choice within the complex texts available at the upper levels of the reading system.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils believe that their teachers listen carefully to them and that they are safe in school.
- Pupils' needs are managed appropriately. The school has developed effective partnerships with parents who may require help and support with their child's medical or emotional issues. As a result, there is clear evidence of improvements in behaviour and attendance, resulting in better progress and increased safety for individuals.
- Pupils enjoy school. They uphold the school's values in their open and welcoming behaviours. They are tolerant and understand the importance of being respectful to others. Throughout the inspection, pupils were keen to talk about learning and those aspects of school they most enjoy. Recent work about Fair Trade has reinforced pupils' understanding of the world around them.
- Pupils are keen to accept additional roles and responsibilities. There are play leaders, a School Council and a Holy Council, as well as a fund-raising group sponsored by local Rotarians. The councils are taking a more prominent role in suggesting and implementing school improvements, such as helping to run collective worship and playing music at lunchtime.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders make sure that all staff implement the school's behaviour policy consistently. They maintain careful records and follow up issues as they arise. The behaviour log shows a considerable reduction in incidents in recent months.
- Pupils are kind, thoughtful and respectful. The school promotes positive attitudes to learning, and in lessons pupils are generally calm and purposeful. Low-level disruption is rare.

- Leaders use a wide range of strategies to improve attendance and reduce persistent absence. For example, there are daily phone calls to the homes of absent pupils, and regular meetings take place with the parents of pupils whose attendance is a concern. However, despite leaders' efforts, attendance remains below the national average, and persistent absence is higher than the national average.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- From 2016 to 2017, pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2 was weak. In 2017, the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard for reading, writing and mathematics was well below the national average. Leaders acknowledge that, previously, expectations had not been high enough.
- Pupils' outcomes have improved rapidly, and pupils are now making much better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because leaders have concentrated on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. More accurate assessment and careful planning have ensured that the majority of current pupils are catching up rapidly.
- Pupils now achieve well. Leaders have ensured that the majority of the current pupils will leave Year 6 having made strong progress from their starting points, with attainment that is at least in line with national expectations.
- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in phonics was close to the national average in 2017. However, the school's review of phonics teaching has resulted in stronger teaching in this subject. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 are making good progress and school assessments demonstrate that they are on track to achieve at a higher level than the national average.
- In mathematics, the school's revised approach better develops reasoning skills. Pupils are now able to use a range of practical and mental strategies to solve problems. Work in books shows good progress for most pupils and a growing excitement in mathematics since the start of the year. Pupils have the opportunity to apply what they have learned more frequently. In a design technology lesson, for example, pupils used their knowledge of three-dimensional shape and nets to construct emergency space shelters. This activity enabled pupils to deepen their understanding.
- Pupils enjoy reading, particularly the challenge of the newly introduced system for tracking progress in key stage 2. They use their reading skills well in their topic work to find additional information about the subjects they are studying. Research about Ancient Egypt, for example, enabled pupils in key stage 2 to make detailed presentation slides about gods and goddesses.
- The additional funding for disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities is used well. There is clear evidence that these pupils are now making good progress. They have specific targets and are well supported in achieving these.
- The school's curriculum is broad and offers a wide range of activities and experiences. The class blogs keep parents fully informed about what pupils are learning. Pupils are inspired to do well and generally make good progress. However, teaching is not yet wholly consistent. The most able pupils do not yet consistently have the opportunities

in writing to make the progress of which they are capable.

- Recent improvements in teaching have had a positive effect on pupils' achievement in writing. Work in English books demonstrates that progress is being made at an accelerated pace and that pupils are becoming more confident writers. Year 6 pupils are able to use a range of punctuation tools accurately, including speech marks and parentheses. They join ideas using a range of conjunctions and start sentences using openers that are well chosen. Pupils write at an age-expected level in a variety of genres. However, there is more to do to ensure that the most able write at greater depth.

Early years provision

Good

- Leadership and management in early years are good. Children in early years enjoy learning and make good progress.
- The staff within Reception work well together. They plan, share and moderate their observations. They have developed an accurate understanding of children's learning and use this knowledge to plan for the next steps.
- Teachers' expectations are high. As a result, several children are now starting to write independently, observing the basic rules of punctuation. Others are accurately recording number work in their books, including calculations such as single-digit subtraction.
- Children in the setting clearly enjoy learning. They are kind and collaborate well together. A group in the outdoor shop worked on activities to do with money. They were taking turns, encouraging and helping each other to recognise coins.
- Children are making good progress in developing their phonic knowledge. They are confident in reading tricky words and identifying sounds.
- Additional adults are used well within the setting. Following an analysis of assessments, leaders decided to place more emphasis on developing fine-motor and early writing skills. All children now have the opportunity to work in a small group to do some daily handwriting, practising pencil control and letter formation. This work has resulted in good gains for these children.
- Safeguarding within early years is effective. The learning environment is carefully maintained, with a good balance of resources indoors and out. Children are appropriately supervised when they are learning, and supporting adults maintain a good balance between observation and intervention.
- Children do well in early years. This is because careful assessment allows the teacher to judge the rate of learning accurately and structure activities accordingly. The rate of learning is good. Children arrive at school with broadly typical starting points for their age and leave Reception Year with above-average outcomes.

School details

Unique reference number	115187
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10041761

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tina Cutler
Headteacher	Louise Eastbrook
Telephone number	01621 860253
Website	http://darcyschool.co.uk
Email address	head@darcyschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 January 2016

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than most primary schools.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is in line with the national average.
- The percentage of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is higher than for most primary schools nationally.
- The majority of the school's pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from a minority ethnic background is low.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment in reading, writing and mathematics for Year 6 pupils.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out by a single Ofsted inspector. The inspector looked at teaching in all classes. He was joined by the head of school for these observations.
- Pupils were observed during assembly, playtimes and lunchtime. The inspector also held a meeting with a representative group of pupils, spoke to pupils about their learning, and listened to pupils read from key stages 1 and 2. He checked work in a range of pupils' books from across the school.
- Meetings were held with five governors and a representative of the local authority, and with the executive headteacher, the head of school and staff members, to discuss a wide range of school activities.
- The inspector reviewed a range of the school's documents, including those relating to development planning, assessment, SEN, attendance and safeguarding.
- A total of 41 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered, as well as 13 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire. The inspector also spoke to parents in the morning at the school gate.

Inspection team

James Richards, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
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