

# St Margaret's Primary Academy

Church Road, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 4JF

## Inspection dates

15–16 May 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Historical underachievement means that standards are not as high as they should be by the end of key stage 2.
- There are inconsistencies in teaching, especially in Years 3 and 4, which means that pupils do not make the rapid progress they should.
- The school has faced a high turnover of teaching staff and had difficulties recruiting. This has led to some turbulence, with changes of teacher mid-year, particularly for older year groups, and has contributed to variation in the quality of teaching over time.
- Expectations of the most able pupils are sometimes not high enough. This means that these pupils do not attain as well as they should.
- Too few pupils make accelerated progress in key stage 2 to enable them to catch up.
- While differences in progress between some disadvantaged pupils and others in the school and nationally are diminishing, this is not the case for all pupils in this group.
- Attendance has historically been too low, and persistent absence has been too high. This year things are improving, but there is still some way to go to reach national averages.

### The school has the following strengths

- Strong leadership from the headteacher and her senior team has eliminated inadequate teaching and brought about rapid improvement.
- The REAch2 multi-academy trust has provided effective support for school leaders.
- The school's curriculum is well planned and provides pupils with many enriching experiences.
- The school's induction arrangements for new teachers are a model of good practice.
- Provision in the early years and key stage 1 is good. Here teaching is more effective and children and pupils reach expected standards.
- The personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils are good. Pupils are keen to learn and show consideration for one another.

## Full report

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

- Ensure that teaching and learning are consistently good, especially in Years 3 and 4, by:
  - having high expectations of all pupils, including the most able
  - setting work that meets pupils' needs.
- Improve pupils' outcomes so that they rapidly increase at least to meet national averages, by:
  - maintaining the positive standards achieved by the end of key stage 1 into and throughout key stage 2
  - ensuring that more pupils make accelerated progress in key stage 2
  - diminishing differences in progress for disadvantaged pupils, where they remain.
- Strengthen leadership and management, by:
  - building on the strategies to reduce rapidly the numbers of pupils that are persistently absent and to increase overall attendance to at least national figures.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- The headteacher has a clear vision for the school. She and her team are committed to sustainable improvement rather than a quick fix. Leaders know the pupils very well and the particular barriers to learning they face. They have achieved much to eliminate inadequate teaching and secure progress for most pupils. They have been particularly successful in raising attainment in Year 6 this year.
- The senior leadership team is reflective and active. Leaders measure the impact of initiatives and make swift adjustments when they are not as effective as they want them to be. In this way they ensure that all their actions make a positive difference.
- Many strategies have been put in place to bring about change. Some of these are fairly recent and it is too early to see their full impact.
- Leaders and governors have taken difficult staffing decisions and looked for innovative solutions to recruitment problems, for example by looking overseas and growing their own support staff into fully qualified teachers. As a result of high-quality coaching, teaching has improved rapidly this year. Unqualified teachers have done particularly well. Even so, there remain some inconsistencies in Years 3 and 4.
- The trust has supported the school's drive for improvement well. This is valued by staff. Teachers said they rate the continuing professional development highly. The trust holds a clear balance between supporting leaders in taking responsibility and holding them accountable for the impact of their actions. Staff have taken on leadership roles. They appreciate visiting trust schools and other schools to see best practice, as well as celebrating what works well within their own school. Teachers also lead projects, such as researching feedback and reading. They evaluate their own practice and that of their peers.
- Teachers all have a live 'teacher on a page' report, which analyses monitoring of different aspects of their work against the national teachers' standards. This gives them specific areas to develop and shows them how they can access support.
- Leaders are ambitious for pupils and have high aspirations. For example, Year 5 pupils went to a careers fair at a local college to find out about the world of work. Pupils created their own films and had a red-carpet award ceremony at a local theatre. The school had an artist in residence during 'art week'. The local Member of Parliament has visited in response to an invitation from the pupils. He took them to the Houses of Parliament to see how democracy works. Pupils have also visited Sizewell nuclear power station to find out about renewable energy.
- Induction is strong. A comprehensive staff handbook informs newly appointed members of staff about the essentials of what is expected. They are supported quickly to adjust to their new surroundings. The school has set up an online platform with set tasks so that teachers can prepare for their arrival and communicate with another member of staff. This enables them to 'hit the road running' when they begin work at the school. Leaders rigorously explain the school's curriculum to overseas teachers. The trust has been so taken with the good practice at St Margaret's that it is using it to form a model induction policy to be rolled out across the region.

- Middle leaders are knowledgeable and can point to the difference they have made in their areas of responsibility. For example, the inclusion leader ensures that the right support is available for the differing needs of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. Leaders ensure that funding for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is spent effectively to meet their needs and promote their good progress.
- The school has a carefully thought-out strategy for spending the pupil premium, taking into account the barriers to learning its disadvantaged pupils face. Leaders evaluate the impact of their actions and make changes when appropriate. This has helped to diminish differences between some disadvantaged pupils and their peers, but not all.
- The curriculum is well thought out and meets the needs of the pupils. It provides them with experiences they would not otherwise have. It offers a good sequence of knowledge and skills. Particular strengths of the curriculum include 'forest schools', where pupils gain knowledge and skills working outside in a natural woodland area, and a wide range of enrichment activities. These include '11 before 11', a series of promises the trust has committed to delivering to all its pupils over their primary career. Pupils suggested things for inclusion that they thought they would never get to do otherwise. Thus, Year 6 pupils went on a visit to France. Year 2 pupils spent a night 'sleeping with sharks' at a local sea-life centre. Despite Lowestoft being on the Suffolk coast, when they joined the school, many pupils had never been on the beach. The school's 'Adventures ambassador' presides over these exciting and unique opportunities.
- The quality of work in other subjects is similar to that in English and mathematics, because it is all recorded in the same book. This is improving for most pupils and in most year groups over time.
- Leaders of art, science, physical education (PE) and religious education have introduced a more refined assessment system closer to that used in English and mathematics. The school is in the process of rolling this out to include all subjects.
- The school spends the PE and sport premium effectively on coaching for pupils and staff, additional clubs and tournaments with other schools. More pupils are accessing sport and becoming fitter as a result of these activities.
- The school has a strong pastoral team that works effectively with families and other agencies to enable vulnerable pupils to make the most of their education. Children are carefully assessed. There is a heavy emphasis on addressing their social and emotional needs so that they are ready to learn. There is a well-structured process for integrating the few pupils on part-time timetables, which involves the county inclusion service.
- The school's website is very attractive and easy for parents and pupils to access. It is greatly informative and has useful links for parents, for example on e-safety. It includes a video from Year 6 pupils explaining about how they ensure their writing is of a good quality.

## Governance of the school

- The trust promotes a local model of governance. Several of the members of the local governing board are long-serving and experienced. The trust had confidence in the work of the former governing body at the time the school joined its family of schools.
- The local governing board works in close partnership with the trust, and receives training. Delegated powers are clear and transparent.
- Governors are supportive of the headteacher and senior leaders, but also hold them to account. Minutes of meetings show evidence of challenge, particularly around raising standards and improving teaching.
- The regional board is strong and provides the school with a good level of support and challenge in addition to scrutiny of the local governing board. Governors and the trust responded promptly to last year's disappointing results at the end of key stage 2 and ensured that rigorous actions were taken to accelerate the momentum of improvement this year.

## Safeguarding

- Safeguarding is effective. There is a strong culture of safeguarding that permeates all the school's work. A pastoral team supports pupils and families facing difficulties and is highly regarded by parents and children. All records are kept carefully and training is up to date. Staff maintain strong links with external agencies. The school makes all necessary checks before employing members of staff, ensuring that its single central record meets requirements. Staff know what to do if they have any concerns.
- Leaders follow correct procedures in managing any complaints. The parent panel provides very useful feedback to the school about what parents like and what could be improved. For example, leaders have reviewed homework and lunchtime arrangements following points raised by parents.
- Pupils say they feel safe. They know about different types of bullying and are confident that staff would deal with any issues they brought to their attention. Parents say they are happy that their children are safe.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- A high turnover of teaching staff in recent years, combined with difficulties in recruitment, has brought about certain turbulence, with changes of teacher mid-year. The quality of teaching has varied and in older year groups in particular there has been historical underachievement.
- While there have been rapid improvements in teaching this year, it is not yet consistently good, especially in Years 3 and 4. This means that some pupils are not making the progress they should.
- At times, teachers' expectations are not high enough and they are not setting work that sufficiently challenges the most able pupils, or supporting the less able well enough.

- Teaching is generally stronger in the early years and key stage 1. Children get off to a good start in Nursery and Reception because teaching staff plan activities that are well suited to their needs and that interest and excite them. This strong teaching continues into Years 1 and 2, where teachers use assessment well to move learning on. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they question well to challenge pupils. Pupils generally make good progress and reach standards in line with the national average by the end of Year 2.
- The impact of improving teaching is evident in pupils' exercise books. In Year 1, for example, pupils have moved from writing simple sentences at the beginning of the year to composing whole paragraphs with conjunctions now. Less-able pupils have gone from simply making marks on the page to writing legible sentences.
- The teaching of writing has improved, as staff have given pupils rich experiences that inspire them to write. For example, a circus set up a big top on the school field and pupils spent a week learning circus skills and about life in the circus. This led them to produce some good-quality writing with the title, 'Mystery under the big top'. Year 5 pupils used their knowledge of mummification in Ancient Egypt to write a comedy play script about an embalming session that went wrong.
- Some weaknesses in writing remain, such as spelling. Some pupils lack a wide vocabulary. Most-able pupils are at times restricted in how they write by a particular format and do not have the freedom to express themselves more creatively. The presentation of pupils' work, while improving, is sometimes inconsistent.
- Curriculum coverage is wide. Pupils write for a variety of purposes. For example, Year 6 pupils devised an advertisement for visiting a local theme park. They wrote a newspaper article reporting the Titanic disaster.
- Phonics is usually taught well. The school teaches its chosen approach consistently across different groups. Pupils can use their phonics skills to break down words to read them. They say they enjoy reading and make full use of the school's well-stocked library and an online reading programme. One pupil said, 'Reading makes our brains grow.' Shared reading in class focuses pupils on a high-quality text and encourages them to tackle questions requiring higher-order skills such as inference and deduction. For example, Year 2 pupils identified key vocabulary when responding to questions about 'The lighthouse keeper's catastrophe'.
- The teaching of mathematics is strong in the early years and key stage 1. It is more uneven in Years 3 to 5. Most-able pupils complete many calculations they can already do, and are not moved on to more challenging work soon enough. Teachers have worked hard this year to fill gaps in the mathematical knowledge of Year 6 pupils, with the result that they have made accelerated progress.
- Relationships are positive between pupils and adults and with each other. They cooperate well in class. When they are being sufficiently challenged, they are keen to learn.

**Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils know about e-safety. They know not to give out personal information on the internet. They show tolerance towards one another and accommodate differences.
- When asked, pupils described the school as 'fun, creative, enjoyable, reflective and kind'.
- The school's innovative learning council visits classes and provides reports to teachers about learning and feedback. Pupils said they prefer 'live' feedback within the lesson so that they know straight away what they have to improve.
- An intervention designed to help vulnerable children thrive is having a positive impact and making good use of forest schools. This has improved their attendance.
- Most pupils are confident and self-assured. They are polite and respectful to adults. They know they can rely on adults to help them out, no matter how small or great the problem.
- Pupils generally show pride in their work. With the introduction of a new handwriting scheme, their presentation is improving.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is strong. There is a wide range of provision through assemblies and the curriculum. Pupils are given experiences to teach them to be good citizens and to embrace British values. They learn about financial literacy through visits from a debt-counselling service. They understand about equality. A pupil commented, 'I enjoy learning about other people's beliefs.' They celebrated St George's day and learned about the legend of St George. They had a visit from a 'knight' in shining armour who talked about being 'honest, gallant, true and fair'. The school council was democratically elected. Year 4 pupils visited the Primary Proms at the Royal Albert Hall to soak up some patriotic atmosphere.
- The school keeps open good lines of communication with alternative providers and checks on the behaviour, attendance and welfare of the small number of pupils involved.

**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They are polite and courteous. Pupils show respect to adults and to one another.
- Pupils say that bullying is rare. When incidents do occur they are dealt with effectively by the teachers. The school's parent questionnaire was completed by the large majority of parents and was positive about behaviour.
- The playground is calm and well supervised. Pupils play sensibly. At lunchtime there is a friendly atmosphere in the dining hall. Pupils have access to forest schools and a new nature trail at lunchtime, which keeps them busy and happy.
- Pupils are positive about behaviour in classrooms. They say that teachers resolve any issues swiftly. They say that the management of behaviour has improved over the past

two years.

- Children are asked how they think disagreements should be resolved from the early years onwards.
- Pupils generally have positive attitudes to learning. When they are not sufficiently challenged, the attention of a few pupils in key stage 2 can wander.
- Pupils are aware of the school's drive for better attendance. In the past, attendance has been too low and too many pupils have missed school persistently. Leaders have worked hard to make clear the importance of regular attendance, and this has shown progress. Attendance is better this year, although still not in line with national averages. While persistent absence has improved, there are still a number of pupils whose attendance is not good enough.
- Leaders have successfully reduced fixed-term exclusions this year to within national norms. Previously, when staffing was more turbulent, an above-average proportion of pupils were excluded.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- While there has been an improving picture this year, outcomes are not strong enough across all year groups and key stages. In particular, attainment is below where it should be in Years 3 to 5. While some pupils have made accelerated progress this year, many pupils in Years 3 to 5 have not made enough progress to be on track for age-related expectations by the end of key stage 2.
- In Year 3, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching mean that pupils have not maintained their promising Year 2 outcomes. Progress is slower than it should be.
- While pupils generally perform more strongly by the end of key stage 1, too few pupils reach greater depth, especially in writing and mathematics. This is because, at times, the most able pupils are not given the challenge they need to excel.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils varies according to year group. There is some evidence of differences diminishing, but not enough in Years 1, 3 and 5. Leaders have made this work a priority and have systems that enable them to track precisely how disadvantaged pupils are doing. Spending of pupil premium funding is proving effective for some, but not all, disadvantaged pupils.
- In 2016 and 2017, outcomes were disappointing at the end of key stage 2 in reading and mathematics particularly. This was because of fluctuations in teaching quality and pupils struggling to cope with new-style tests.
- This year, pupils have been better prepared for national assessments and the school has kept a close eye on those pupils at risk of not reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics combined. As a result, Year 6 pupils have made accelerated progress in reading and mathematics.
- Outcomes have been consistently in line with the national average in early years and key stage 1 at the expected standard. Year 1 pupils are on track to meet the nationally required standard in the phonics screening check.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are well supported and the majority make secure progress from their starting points. They have very differing needs. The SEN

leader knows them well. Pupils are encouraged to grow in confidence and independence, for example in extending their vocabulary.

- Outcomes for the small number of pupils in alternative provision are generally positive. These placements suit them and enable them to gain the skills they need to return successfully to their mainstream classes.
- Outcomes in reading have improved as a result of the introduction of shared reading across the school and a focus on high-quality texts. A new approach to developing higher-order reading skills is proving positive. The school's chosen scheme is effective. This particularly helps with extending pupils' vocabulary.
- There has been a focus on filling gaps in knowledge in basic concepts and arithmetic skills. This includes daily problem-solving. This is helping less-able and middle-ability pupils to make stronger progress. The most able pupils make very few mistakes in their books. This is because sometimes the work is not challenging enough for them. There is not enough evidence of them grappling to reason out difficult problems.
- Prior gaps in attainment between boys and girls in reading and writing have been closing, especially in writing. Teachers have made a conscious effort to find things that motivate boys to write, such as the Ancient Egypt topic, and consequently their performance has improved.

## Early years provision

**Good**

- Children make a strong start in the early years because staff know them very well and plan activities that excite them and meet their needs. They are well prepared for learning in Year 1.
- The indoor and outdoor areas are stimulating and well resourced. Children enjoy learning in such eye-catching surroundings.
- Teaching assistants use their considerable skills to promote children's learning. They question children carefully and offer support as required. They know when to intervene and when to hold back to let learning take its course.
- Children are allowed to take risks within a caring environment, such as going high on the climbing wall. They have the satisfaction of working out how to come down on their own (without jumping).
- The learning outside reflects the learning indoors and covers a range of different areas. For example, children were using pieces of wood to order numbers. They made a rocket out of shapes and could name them, including the cone.
- Children cooperate and work well together. They show high levels of perseverance and resilience. They are able to sustain concentration because they find learning enjoyable and interesting.
- Children are curious. They develop a love of learning because of their positive experiences in the early years. They are active learners, willing to have a go at new things.
- The early years is a safe place for children to learn. All safeguarding arrangements conform to the high standards established throughout the school.

- Phonics is taught well. Children develop a love of reading and are soon able to sound out new words to read them.
- In the Nursery, children are establishing good work habits. For example, when they had completed an activity to recreate Van Gogh's painting, 'Starry Night', children tidied away 'so that it will be ready for the next group'.
- The early years is led and managed well. Parents are supportive of the provision. Children make good progress from starting points that are often well below what is typical for their age. Good use is made of the early years pupil premium to support disadvantaged children.
- On occasion, observations of what children can do are too descriptive and lack depth. When this happens, it is unclear how children could extend their learning.

## School details

Unique reference number	141984
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10046610

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	437
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Vicki Hunt
Headteacher	Rebecca Clarke
Telephone number	01502 530130
Website	<a href="http://www.st-margarets.suffolk.school.uk">www.st-margarets.suffolk.school.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@st-margarets.suffolk.school.uk">admin@st-margarets.suffolk.school.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds who speak English as an additional language is low. Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is high.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above average, including those who have statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans.
- The school runs its own breakfast club and a range of after-school clubs.
- In 2017, the school met current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- There have been many changes of staff in recent years. In September 2017, there

were seven class teachers new to the school, five from overseas.

- The school became an academy sponsored by REAch2 multi-academy trust on 1 July 2015. The trust is divided into four regions and the school is overseen by a regional board. It has its own local governing board. This is its first inspection since becoming an academy.
- A small number of pupils access alternative provision at The Harbour Pru, Saturn Close; First Base Pru, the Ashley School site; and Catch 22 Include, the Aspire Centre.

## Information about this inspection

- National assessment tests for Year 6 pupils were taking place during the inspection. Year 4 pupils were away on a residential visit throughout the course of the inspection.
- Inspectors heard pupils read. Inspectors looked closely at samples of pupils' work with the headteacher and the assistant headteacher, focusing in particular on Year 4 and Year 6, because it was not possible to see these pupils being taught.
- The inspection team observed learning in all classes other than Years 4 and 6, many of them jointly with the headteacher or assistant headteacher. Some learning was also observed with representatives of the trust.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of the school's documents, including development plans, policies, self-evaluation reports and safeguarding records. They considered evidence of the school's partnership work and the information provided for families.
- A meeting was held with groups of pupils chosen at random. Discussions were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and other staff on a wide range of subjects, including safeguarding arrangements and their professional development. The lead inspector talked to the regional director of the trust and the assistant regional director. He also talked to the chair of the local governing board and one other governor.
- The inspection team considered 32 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including three free-text comments. They also looked at the school's own survey of parents' views. An inspector spoke to the parent panel. The inspection team considered 26 responses to the staff questionnaire and seven responses to the pupils' questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Nick Butt, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Rachael Judd	Ofsted Inspector
John Crane	Ofsted Inspector

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