

St Mary's Church of England Primary School, St Neots

Wintringham Road, St Neots, Cambridgeshire PE19 1NX

Inspection dates

12–13 June 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	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and governors have successfully raised expectations of both teachers and pupils. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved significantly.
- Most current pupils are making good progress, including those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Governors and trust representatives are effective, knowledgeable and committed to the school and its pupils. They have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They support and challenge leaders to improve provision.
- The curriculum and a wide variety of clubs and trips support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- The early years provision is good. It is well led. Children make good progress from their starting points, which are typically lower than expected for their age.
- Some parents expressed concerns about the school, in particular regarding bullying and leadership. Inspectors found that leaders are effective, and most pupils are confident that teachers deal with bullying effectively.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is usually good. However, there is a small minority of pupils whose behaviour does not meet the high standards expected.
- Overall, absence and persistent absence are reducing but remain above the national average. This is also the case for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Pupils' progress at the end of key stage 2 improved in 2017 and was broadly average. However, the proportion of pupils attaining the standards expected for their age in the combination of reading, writing and mathematics was lower than did so nationally.
- Current pupils make less progress in writing than in reading and mathematics. Teachers do not provide opportunities for pupils to routinely use and practise their writing skills in longer tasks, other than in English lessons.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to accelerate pupils' progress and raise achievement by ensuring that all teachers help pupils to practise and develop their writing skills in longer tasks and different contexts.
- Improve outcomes by further accelerating pupils' progress, so that more pupils attain the standards expected for their age in the combination of reading, writing and mathematics by the end of key stage 2.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - further reducing absence and persistent absence in the school, including for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, so that they are at least in line with the national averages for all pupils
 - improving the behaviour of the small minority of pupils who do not meet the school's high expectations regarding their behaviour in lessons and towards other pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, with the support of the deputy headteacher and governors, has set high expectations for staff and pupils. As a result, leaders have successfully improved the quality of education provided by the school.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is appropriately challenging and gives pupils the opportunity to experience learning in a broad range of subjects. For example, all key stage 2 pupils have the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument. Pupils say that they enjoy the opportunity to experience practical activities in science and to learn skills in physical education (PE). Leaders have ensured that there are clearly identified opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in different areas of learning. These are complemented by a variety of trips and assemblies.
- Leaders regularly check on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school. They use these checks to identify where they can make improvements and to ensure that their actions are making a difference. They have ensured, for example, that mathematics teaching is consistently effective in helping pupils develop their understanding of key ideas and their reasoning skills.
- Arrangements for managing teachers' performance are rigorous. Leaders use the system to identify training needs and set expectations for the progress that pupils make. Leaders hold teachers stringently to account and address underperformance. The trust monitors and supports this aspect of leaders' work closely.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher make good use of the support available to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school. They have worked with advisers from the trust to ensure that they have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, senior leaders focus on the appropriate priorities for improvement.
- Leadership of SEN is effective. The special needs coordinator has a good knowledge of individual pupils' needs and is tenacious in accessing support for pupils from external agencies. As a result, most pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are making good progress and there are examples of individuals who have made strong progress in a short period of time because of the help provided.
- The sports premium is used well. The PE leader has purchased additional equipment so that pupils have the opportunity to learn and develop skills in PE lessons. Pupils appreciate the opportunities that they have to be physically active. There are a variety of sports clubs and after-school activities offered that include football, netball, rounders, cricket, yoga and golf.
- The leader responsible for the pupil premium makes good use of this additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils. She has identified the barriers to learning faced by disadvantaged pupils and ensured that actions are in place to overcome them. As a result, most disadvantaged pupils are making good progress from their different starting points. There have been improvements in attendance, but school leaders

acknowledge that there is still work to do in order to improve the attendance of some disadvantaged pupils.

- Despite improvements in attendance and a significant reduction in the number of pupils excluded from school, leaders recognise that there is still work to do to reduce absence further and improve the behaviour of a small group of pupils. Leaders are attempting to engage more with the wider school community and improve communication. They know that a number of parents have a negative view of the school, particularly regarding behaviour, bullying and the actions that leaders have taken to secure improvement in the school.

Governance of the school

- The Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust (DEMAT) provides a range of support to the school. This includes regular visits from a school improvement adviser, subject support in literacy and science, and support from the safeguarding and inclusion lead. This support has been effective in improving the standard of education provided by the school.
- The local governing body (LGB) has provided a balance of support and challenge to school leaders that has contributed to improvements since the school became an academy. Governors have a good range of knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles effectively and ensure that they access relevant training to remain up to date regarding developments in education.
- Members of the LGB regularly visit the school to check on the work of leaders. They know the school well and their desire that the school provides a high-quality experience for pupils is clear to see.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders' checks on the suitability of adults to work with children are thorough. The record of these checks is accurately maintained and the headteacher and nominated governor review it regularly to ensure that it meets requirements.
- Adults receive regular training and updates on all aspects of keeping children safe from harm and recognising possible signs of neglect. Adults record any concerns, which leaders then monitor and review. The leaders responsible for safeguarding ensure that, when necessary, they promptly make referrals to other agencies. This ensures that children and their families quickly receive any help that they need.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the school became an academy. Leaders' expectations of teachers and other adults are clear. The impact on pupils' learning as a result of chosen strategies and approaches to teaching is evident in the progress that most pupils are making.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and know their pupils well. This ensures that teachers and other adults routinely provide pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, with learning that is appropriately challenging, whatever their ability. As a result, most pupils are making good progress. Where this is less consistent, it is where leaders have had difficulties recruiting and retaining permanent staff.
- There is a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics. Pupils have opportunities to apply their learning in different contexts, such as science and problems involving money. Teachers help pupils to develop their problem-solving and reasoning skills well and pupils spoke confidently about their learning in mathematics.
- The teaching of reading is effective. Pupils develop their phonics skills well and most use these confidently when faced with unfamiliar words. Teachers and other adults also help pupils to develop their skills in comprehension. Pupils from different classes, who read to an inspector, were able to show levels of understanding appropriate to their current attainment. Teachers also provide regular opportunities for pupils to read and a commercial scheme has been adopted to help promote wider reading.
- Adults have raised their expectations of pupils' writing throughout the school. Teachers model and share examples of writing so that pupils can recognise and learn the features of different forms of writing in addition to learning elements of grammar, punctuation and spelling. This has had a positive impact on improving the quality of many pupils' writing. However, teachers do not give the pupils sufficient opportunities to practise and transfer these skills to independent pieces of writing for different purposes, such as reports in science or longer written pieces in history or religious education. As a result, current pupils' progress is less strong in writing than in other subjects.
- Previously, ineffective teaching and low expectations have had a negative impact on the learning of pupils in key stage 2. Leaders acknowledge that teaching will need to further accelerate pupils' progress to increase the number of pupils who attain the standards expected for their age by the end of key stage 2.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are confident and almost all have positive attitudes to learning.
- Teachers encourage pupils to use 'skills squares' to support their learning, in addition to promoting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. These highlight key values, such as perseverance, communication, accepting challenge and being reflective. Relationships are good and pupils are not afraid to make mistakes or take on challenges. One pupil told an inspector, 'Challenge helps me learn.'
- Pupils have a good understanding of why it is important to learn about others' cultures and respect the opinions and beliefs of others. For example, a Year 1 pupil spoke knowledgeably about Sikhism. One pupil who spoke to inspectors simply said, 'We are

taught to treat other people as we would want to be treated.'

- Pupils spoken to during the inspection and the responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey indicate that almost all feel that teachers deal with bullying effectively when it occurs. This contrasts with the concerns raised by the majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. Pupils said that peer mediators are helpful in resolving disputes.
- Similarly, pupils say that they feel safe in school. They spoke confidently about how to stay safe from risk, including when using the internet. Pupils' responses do not reflect the concerns raised by the majority of parents who submitted responses to Parent View.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils generally behave well in lessons and in less structured parts of the day, such as playtime and lunchtime. Pupils are typically polite and respectful to one another and adults.
- Even the youngest children are made aware of what adults expect and almost always respond well to adults' direction. Pupils understand the system to reward good behaviour and feel that this works well for the very large majority of pupils. Pupils report, however, that there is a small number of pupils who disturb their learning in some classes. Leaders use external support, when available, to help those pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour. They also monitor behaviour incidents to identify patterns and the cause of any incidents. Behaviour has improved significantly over the past two years. However, leaders acknowledge that a small group of pupils require further support to manage their own behaviour so that it meets the high standards expected.
- Because of leaders' close monitoring of attendance and efforts to reward good attendance, rates of absence and persistent absence are reducing. Pupils are very aware of the importance of regular attendance and how this helps them to learn. They welcome rewards for good attendance in celebration assemblies and through prizes for high attendance. However, there are still some pupils who are absent from school too frequently, including some pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- In 2017, achievement increased for pupils at the end of key stage 2, having been below the government floor standard in 2016. Pupils' progress in reading and writing was broadly average from their starting points, although the progress made by pupils in mathematics remained in the lowest 20% nationally. Attainment in writing was below average and the proportion of pupils who attained the standard expected for their age in each of reading, writing and mathematics was lower than did so nationally.
- Published data shows that pupils at the end of key stage 1 attained standards that were broadly in line with those achieved by pupils nationally in reading and

mathematics in 2017. Attainment in writing was below the national average. The proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard in phonics at the end of Year 1 has been in line with the national average for the past two years.

- The progress made by disadvantaged pupils at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics improved in 2017. This group made progress that was broadly in line with that made by other pupils nationally. At the end of key stage 1 in 2017, disadvantaged pupils' attainment was in line with that of other pupils nationally in mathematics but lower in reading and writing.
- The school's assessment information and work in pupils' books indicate that pupils are making good progress in a range of subjects. Pupils' attainment and progress in upper key stage 2 have been affected more negatively than is the case for other year groups by the previously ineffective teaching and low expectations that were in place prior to the school becoming an academy.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities typically make good progress from their individual starting points. Leaders track pupils' progress closely and use the information to tailor the help provided to meet different pupils' needs. This has resulted in some individuals quickly making rapid gains in knowledge and understanding.
- Most disadvantaged pupils currently in the school are making good progress from their starting points, including in reading, writing and mathematics. This is because teachers and leaders ensure that they use additional funding to help meet pupils' specific needs.
- The small number of most-able pupils in the school are, on the whole, making good progress. This is because most teachers provide them with activities and tasks that provide the right level of challenge.
- Changes to the teaching of mathematics are supporting current pupils to make stronger progress than has previously been the case. They are confidently developing their ability to problem-solve and demonstrate their reasoning.
- Although progress in writing is increasing across the school, it is not yet as strong as in reading and mathematics for current pupils.

Early years provision

Good

- Children join the early years with a level of development that is typically below that typical for their age. A greater proportion have achieved the standards expected for their age by the time they leave the reception class. This reflects the good progress that children make.
- Teaching is good. Adults work well as a team and thoughtfully plan activities across all areas of the early years curriculum. The most effective teaching ensures that activities have a clear purpose in terms of what children will learn and how activities contribute to developing their independence.
- The recently appointed leader of early years quickly gained an accurate view of the strengths and relative weaknesses of the provision. Along with senior leaders, she has ensured that appropriate and credible plans for improvement are in place. These are already having a positive impact on children's learning, such as developing their skills in

phonics.

- Children behave well and adults clearly communicate their expectations regarding behaviour. Adults establish and model good relationships with children. Children happily cooperate with one another in learning activities and during playtime. This contributes positively to children's learning and personal, social and emotional development.
- As in the rest of the school, adults ensure that children are kept safe from harm. Arrangements for safeguarding and promoting children's well-being are thorough. Adults supervise pupils throughout the school day. Appropriate arrangements are in place for the identification and care of pupils who have additional needs.
- Leaders have increased opportunities for children to practise their writing. Children now write every day and all activities include options to develop their writing. However, their progress in writing is not yet as strong as in other areas of learning, with a number of children who still struggle to form letters and write simple sentences.

School details

Unique reference number	142034
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10046626

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	162
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Peter Maxwell
Headteacher	Ben Hodson
Telephone number	01480 398 048
Website	www.stmarys.cambs.sch.uk
Email address	office@stmarys.cambs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Mary's Church of England opened as an academy sponsored by DEMAT on 1 September 2015. This followed the issue of an academy order after the predecessor school was judged to require special measures when inspected in March 2015.
- The current headteacher was appointed in January 2016 and the deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2016.
- DEMAT has overall responsibility for the school. The trust provides support through school improvement, subject, and inclusion and safeguarding lead advisers. There is a local governing body that is responsible for duties delegated by the trust, which include holding leaders to account for the standard of education provided, the appointment of staff and setting the values and ethos of the school.
- The school is an average-sized primary school. The proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds is well above average. There is a higher proportion of

pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities with a statement or education, health and care plans than in most schools.

- The school has early years provision consisting of a Nursery and Reception class. There are separate Year 1 and Year 2 classes and three mixed-year-group classes in key stage 2.
- The school met the government's floor standards in 2017. These set the minimum standards for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 2.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made visits to classes to observe learning in all year groups. They made some of these visits with school leaders. Inspectors also scrutinised pupils' work in a range of subjects, listened to a group of pupils read and reviewed the school's assessment information.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents and policies, including behaviour and attendance information, records of monitoring carried out by the trust, minutes of the local governing body meetings, records of governors' visits to the school and documentation relating to the safeguarding of pupils.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils in lessons, met with a group of key stage 1 and 2 pupils and spoke to pupils when observing them at informal times, such as playtime and lunchtime, to gather their views on the school. Inspectors also analysed the 48 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- Meetings were held with leaders, members of the local governing body and representatives from the trust. The lead inspector also had a telephone conversation with the chief executive officer of DEMAT. Inspectors considered the 19 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire and emails sent to the school and Ofsted.
- Inspectors considered the 58 responses to Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View, and the 40 free-text comments submitted by parents. In addition, inspectors considered a survey of parents that the school had conducted. Inspectors also spoke to parents before school. Six letters and three emails received from parents were also considered.

Inspection team

Paul Wilson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Katherine Douglas

Ofsted Inspector

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