

St Columb Major Academy

Newquay Road, St Columb, Cornwall TR9 6RW

Inspection dates

15–16 January 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils do not make sufficient progress by the end of Year 6. The proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics is below the national average.
- After a period of considerable turbulence, and a sharp decline in standards in 2017, the trust has provided support to ensure that the school now has the capacity to improve.
- Leaders' actions are well devised, but these do not yet demonstrate sufficient impact.
- Governors' monitoring of the work of the school requires greater precision to fully evaluate the impact of actions.
- The quality of teaching and learning is too variable. This is partly to do with changes in staffing but is also because agreed approaches are not consistently applied.
- Teachers do not routinely direct pupils to suitable starting points. Some teachers do not regularly use assessment to identify misconceptions, including in the accuracy of spelling and punctuation.
- Teaching does not ensure that the most able pupils are challenged as effectively as they should be. As a result, some do not reach the highest standards of which they are capable.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not reach the expected standard by the end of Year 2 or make sufficient progress by the end of Year 6.
- Subject leaders' skills are not refined enough to support senior leaders to drive improvements. Pupils do not develop their knowledge and skills sufficiently across a range of subjects.
- Absence, particularly persistent absence, for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is too high.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders have a clear vision to provide the direction required after a period of transition. They articulate high standards and remain resolute to achieving these.
- Staff and adults in the early years have created a positive and nurturing environment in which children achieve well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - governors fully evaluate the impact of strategies so that pupils make more rapid progress
 - recent improvements are sustained, and consistent expectations are applied, so variations in teachers' practice is reduced
 - subject leaders further develop their skills and expertise so that they can support the drive for improvement
 - the curriculum is embedded so that all pupils can achieve well across a range of subjects.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers direct pupils to activities that match their learning needs, particularly the most able and disadvantaged pupils
 - pupils have a clear understanding of how they can improve their work and do so
 - pupils improve the accuracy of spelling and punctuation and demonstrate these skills independently.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - continuing to implement robust strategies to challenge those pupils who do not attend school regularly, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Up until the 2017 results, standards at the school were high. The trust's monitoring of the school and the conclusions from externally commissioned reviews did not foresee the sharp decline in standards. The disappointing results of 2017 galvanised the trust to provide additional support and appoint a new substantive headteacher. These actions halted a further decline in standards and, since this time, senior leaders have been relentless in their pursuit of improvement. However, they have not had the time to sufficiently demonstrate compelling and sustained impact of this work.
- Since taking up post, the headteacher has provided an accurate picture of the quality of the school's work. These reflections are honest and clearly recognise the extent of the work still required. Priorities have been identified sensibly so that there is clarity of the improvement planning objectives.
- Staff are supportive of new initiatives and are positive about the support and training they receive to review and refine their approaches. However, much of this work is recent and the impact is yet to be realised in improving classroom practice and outcomes sufficiently.
- The support provided by the trust has created additional capacity. Leaders have used expertise from within the school as well as from outside. Staff have responded positively to this. There is an optimism and confidence in the capability of leaders to make the changes needed.
- Leaders now track pupils' progress at regular points in the year. This means that there is a timely overview of the progress pupils are making. In response, changes have been made to class structures in Year 2 and Year 6 to support those pupils who fall behind to catch up. Leaders validate assessments through standardised tests. Teachers moderate work with other schools, so there is a greater confidence in the reliability of this information. This has not been accurate enough in the past and failed to predict the drop in standards.
- Senior leaders have had to make tough decisions when tackling practice which does not meet expectations. While this has meant that there has been instability in staffing over the past year, these decisions have meant that the school is now in a position to move forward at a greater pace. Newly qualified staff receive effective professional guidance to ensure a firm foundation at the start of their teaching careers.
- Disadvantaged pupils do not meet the expected standards in key stages 1 and 2. Leaders have identified the barriers to learning for current pupils and actions are now in place. However, teachers have not closely aligned strategies to individual pupils' needs so have not successfully overcome the legacy of weaker teaching. Consequently, current pupils do not make the accelerated progress needed to reach age-related expectations.
- Senior leaders ensure that funding to support pupils with SEND is used appropriately. These pupils are supported well in class and this means that the progress they make is improving.
- Subject coordinators are enthusiastic and are developing their understanding of their

strategic role. However, their skills are not developed enough to effectively support senior leaders to raise standards in the quality of teaching. The plans in place demonstrate that middle leaders are considering the development of pupils' understanding across a range of subjects and the progression of subject-specific skills. However, this work is recently introduced, and the quality of subject leaders' evaluation is too generic. There remains a disparity in the quality of pupils' work across different areas of the curriculum.

- The environment is vibrant and reinforces the values that underpin the school. 'Wow walls' and other displays present the work that pupils have completed so that these can be seen and celebrated. The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities that enhance pupils' experiences.
- Leaders have used the sport premium effectively to improve participation rates and pupils' understanding of their health and fitness. They encourage pupils to make healthy choices and, as a result, the number of pupils who participate in clubs and activities has increased.

Governance of the school

- Newly appointed governors have brought the expertise needed to support and challenge leaders. There are clear lines of accountability and governors understand their statutory responsibilities. They visit the school regularly and these meetings are linked to the improvement plan priorities. Governors ask questions of school leaders, but these are not yet precisely enough aligned to pupils' outcomes. Crucially, governors' challenge is not sharply focused on whether actions are having the intended impact.
- The trust maintains an overview of the school's budget. Governors meet to discuss the use of the additional funding provided for disadvantaged pupils. They have an understanding of the school's work with this group of pupils and the barriers to learning that exist. However, this is not yet effective in ensuring that pupils make more rapid progress.
- Governors attend training events provided by the trust and also from further afield. They are reflective and committed to developing their skills so that they can evaluate more thoroughly the extensive information now provided by school leaders.
- Governors are aware that a significant minority of parents and carers express concerns about aspects of the school's work. They understand the importance of cultivating positive relationships. Governors are committed to extending opportunities to meet with parents to discuss these concerns in a positive and constructive way.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a vigilance around safeguarding and there have been changes made to effectively strengthen practices. All staff know how to apply child protection procedures. Training is up to date and this includes protecting pupils from radicalism and exploitation. All statutory checks are made to ensure that staff are safe to work with children.

- Leaders have appointed staff who provide early help for vulnerable pupils and their families. Staff have an extensive knowledge of pupils' contexts and needs, and they are proactive in working with external agencies to support pupils who are at risk. Record-keeping is diligent and there is a clear chronology of actions and outcomes.
- Pupils can clearly explain how to recognise risk and know how to stay safe, including when online. The majority of parents and carers who responded to Parent View agree that their children feel safe in school. Pupils have recognised the changes that have been made to establish a positive environment. They say that they are more confident in talking to their teachers about any concerns they have and trust them to take the action required.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning varies too much across the school. Teachers do not consistently direct pupils to well-matched activities or move them on quickly enough when they are ready. This means that higher-ability pupils are not encouraged to extend their thinking and demonstrate a higher level of understanding. Where pupils are not secure in their understanding, they do not always receive timely support and therefore they do not complete work or sustain their concentration.
- Teachers' support for those who have fallen behind, particularly disadvantaged pupils, is not developed well enough to rectify existing gaps in understanding. Strategies at classroom level remain too generic and do not focus well enough on supporting pupils to overcome their specific barriers to learning. While there are signs of improved progress, current pupils are not catching up quickly enough.
- Teachers do not routinely use assessment information to help pupils to understand what they need to do to improve. Teachers' guidance does not always pinpoint the necessary skills that will improve pupils' standard of work. Where this guidance is more specific, the expectation to respond is not embedded into pupils' routines. This means that misconceptions are not identified quickly enough, and pupils continue to make the same mistakes. This limits the progress that pupils make.
- The approach to reading is developing so that pupils are encouraged to read for enjoyment. Pupils are clear of the expectation that they read regularly and say that there are times during the school day when they can do so. While this is not always recorded in their reading logs, pupils say that they can choose from books at the appropriate level or can make their own selections from home. They regularly 'quiz' on their books to develop their skills and can talk about what they need to do next to develop their reading skills further.
- Teachers have adopted a more structured approach to the teaching of phonics and this is improving pupils' ability to match letters to sounds. Pupils use these skills well to identify unfamiliar words. Guided reading sessions support pupils to consider both fiction and non-fiction texts. Teachers provide activities that support pupils to develop skills such as scanning, summarising and inference. The most able pupils demonstrate an ability to read fluently and with appropriate expression. However, at times, pupils do not have the scope to demonstrate higher degrees of skill.
- The development of writing has been a priority for the school, particularly in developing handwriting skills. This strategy has been successful in promoting the

importance of writing legibly and in the improved presentation of work. The school-wide approach means that pupils have clearly defined objectives, ranging from 'getting going' to 'rocket racers', and write for a variety of audiences and purpose. Where this is applied, pupils write well, using adventurous vocabulary and sustaining their own compositions successfully. However, pupils often start at a level that is too low for their level of ability or repeat concepts that they already know. This stifles their opportunity to write independently when they are clearly able to do so. Teachers do not consistently help pupils to overcome misconceptions in letter orientation, spelling, punctuation and grammar. This hampers pupils' fluency and ability to express their ideas convincingly.

- Leaders have adopted a more coordinated approach to the teaching of mathematics so that teachers plan work in a sequential and structured way. This has meant that pupils' fluency and confidence have started to improve, and their calculation skills are becoming more secure. The most able pupils are provided with activities that require them to use their knowledge to solve problems. They can articulate their approach, using subject terminology, and consider alternative ways to solve calculations. However, pupils are not always able to explain their methodology or rationale for their answers. Where teachers allow number orientation or basic calculation errors to go unchecked, pupils do not remedy their mistakes and misunderstandings continue.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils consider aspects of their personal development and well-being at an appropriate level. For example, pupils in Year 5 enjoy their 'daily mile' and pupils of all ages can talk about how they are encouraged to eat healthily. Pupils understand the risks associated with smoking and are aware of issues such as road safety.
- Leaders have established the importance of developing pupils' self-esteem and leadership responsibilities. Pupils are proud of their roles as 'stay safe mentors' and 'playground buddies'. They recognise the importance of ensuring that all pupils feel valued and included. Inspectors saw examples of where pupils took care of each other, helping each other to climb the stairs or put their coats on for outside play.
- Leaders have planned the curriculum so that pupils consider issues important to their personal and social understanding. Pupils have a developing understanding of concepts relevant to them in modern Britain and regularly explore different cultures and religions. Pupils record these wider experiences in their 'floor books', which are a colourful pictorial summary of their learning.
- Pupils can articulate the values that are integral to their school and appreciate the role that the school council plays in representing their views. Pupils are encouraged to understand the history of, and explore, their local environment. For example, in the school assembly, school councillors confidently explained '20 things to do before leaving an ACE school', which had been the result of a trust-wide school council project. Forest school is a welcome part of the pupils' curriculum and exciting plans are in place to develop outside spaces further, in partnership with the Eden Project.

- Pupils understand expectations and respond to these well. They say there has been a positive change in their feeling of well-being at the school because of the changes that leaders have made. A significant minority of parents and carers who responded to the Parent View survey did not feel that incidents of bullying were dealt with effectively. However, the relationships observed during the inspection between teachers and pupils, as well as pupils towards each other, were positive and respectful.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Some pupils and parents express concerns about the school's ability to deal with behavioural issues. Leaders have now implemented a new behaviour strategy, and this has created an environment that is conducive to pupils' learning. Leaders have been successful in addressing challenging behaviour. For example, the 'nurture' provision, for pupils who find behaviour expectations difficult to manage, supports pupils to continue with their learning and access support in a calming environment. Where pupils require additional support, leaders have tailored timetables to help pupils cope with situations that might prove problematic.
- The rates of absence, notably persistent absence, are too high, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND. Some of this is due to pupils with medical needs but is largely a result of leaders not challenging absence stringently enough in the past. Leaders have implemented a more rigorous approach and this has had an impact in the short-term on improving overall attendance and punctuality. However, the impact on persistent absence is more modest. Leaders are aware of pupils who are vulnerable and can illustrate examples of where the support provided has led to improved attendance. It is too early to say whether this will be sustained over a longer period of time.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading and mathematics at the end of Year 2 are close to the national averages. However, a smaller proportion of pupils than seen nationally demonstrate a higher level of understanding. Historical weakness in the teaching of writing means that, although the school has identified improving this as a priority, current pupils still have a distance to travel to meet age-related expectations.
- By the end of Year 6, in 2018, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in combined reading, writing and mathematics improved but remains below the national average. Pupils do not make sufficient progress by the end of key stage 2. The strategies that leaders have put in place are beginning to show initial progress, but it is too early to see the full impact of this work in closing the gaps that still exist due to the legacy of weaker teaching.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND do not meet age-related expectations by the end of Year 2 or make sufficient progress when they leave in Year 6. Current disadvantaged pupils continue to perform below other pupils nationally due to the inconsistencies with which teachers provide appropriate support. The progress of pupils

with SEND is improving due to the support that teachers provide.

- For the past two years, the progress that the most able pupils make has been in the lowest 20% of schools nationally for reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have responded to this by using approaches that will provide current pupils with more complex tasks. However, teachers do not yet routinely direct pupils to work that will allow them to extend their thinking at a higher level.
- The proportion of pupils who achieve the phonics screening check is improving but remains below the national average. Leaders have quickly recognised that younger pupils' knowledge of phonics was not strong enough and have provided considerable support, resources and training for teachers to improve pupils' understanding. As a result, current pupils demonstrate an improved ability to apply these skills.
- The proportion of pupils who demonstrate a secure understanding of spelling, punctuation and grammar by the end of Year 6 remains below the national average. This is demonstrated in the work of current pupils, which is often flawed in terms of these technical skills.

Early years provision

Good

- Children who arrive in Reception with skills that are below those typical for their age make good progress. This means that the proportion of children, including disadvantaged children, who reach a good level of development has increased and is now above the national average. The proportion of children who exceed the expected standard continues to improve and is also above the national figure.
- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the needs of children. This has been pivotal in developing the curriculum so that it provides activities which support children to develop their skills and knowledge across all areas of learning. The learning environment is a bustle of activity and encourages children to learn and improve their fine motor skills and physical development.
- Children sustain concentration during free-play activities, often choosing activities that help them to practise their writing, measuring and number skills. They are well supported by teaching assistants who ask probing questions to encourage children to engage in learning conversations with adults and with each other. Children have the scope to develop their imaginative play and they do so in a positive and cooperative manner. Careful thought has been given to engage boys, who meet expectations for their age but are not as secure as girls. This has improved the performance of boys.
- Adults model letters and sounds, and their secure understanding of phonic development underpins the teaching of reading and writing. Children begin to use effective pencil grip and become more confident in mark-making and following simple patterns. This develops into children writing recognisable letters, then simple words and, for the most able, simple sentences with accurate sentence demarcation. Children are encouraged to consider the conventions of storytelling and begin to use these to develop their own compositions as emergent writers.
- Children are provided with activities that allow them to rehearse their sorting and number recognition. They practise number formation and the most able children move on, when they are ready, to more complex mathematical problems. They demonstrate

an ability to recognise mathematical symbols and solve simple calculations accurately.

- Staff have established effective links with parents and carers as well as pre-school settings. This engagement means that teachers have an accurate understanding of children's capabilities and needs when they arrive in Reception and this supports them to settle into routines quickly.
- Safeguarding is effective and welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	136862
Local authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	10053260

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	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	387
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Phil Mason
Headteacher	Marie Taylor
Telephone number	01637 880272
Website	www.st-columb-major.cornwall.sch.uk
Email address	secretary@st-columb-major.cornwall.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–13 June 2012

Information about this school

- St Columb Major Academy is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Since 2015, the school has been part of the Atlantic Centre of Excellence (ACE) multi-academy trust. The trust has seven primary schools. Under the scheme of delegation, the board of trustees is responsible for the standards pupils reach at the school. The board delegates some functions to the local academy governing body (LAB). Trust officers provide support to the school.
- The school is part of the Kernow Teaching School Alliance.
- The headteacher was appointed in September 2017 following an interim headteacher being in place for the previous two terms.
- In the last academic year, there was significant staff turnover. There is a greater stability in staffing for this academic year but there have been some significant periods

of teacher absence.

- The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is similar to the national average.
- The majority of pupils are from a White British background.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below the national average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is higher than the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across a range of subjects and age groups and scrutinised pupils' written work. Observations were conducted jointly with members of the leadership team.
- Meetings were held with members of the leadership team and representatives from the governing body. In addition, inspectors met with curriculum and pastoral leaders. The lead inspector met with the board of trustees and the chief executive of the multi-academy trust. A phone call was made to the school's 'challenge partner'.
- Inspectors met with pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, both formally and informally, to discuss their views about their experience of school.
- Inspectors looked at the school's documentation, including the evaluation of the school's effectiveness and priorities for future improvement. Inspectors reviewed progress, behaviour and attendance information relating to current pupils, and governors' records.
- School policies relating to safeguarding, pupils' behaviour, the use of additional funding, including the pupil premium and the sport premium, and the curriculum were also scrutinised.
- Inspectors listened to a selection of pupils read.
- Inspectors considered the 125 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the five free-text responses from parents. An email and letter that were sent to the lead inspector were also considered.

Inspection team

Sarah McGinnis, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Adam Morris	Ofsted Inspector
Paula Marsh	Ofsted 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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