

St Mark's CofE Primary School

High Street, Pensnett, Brierley Hill, West Midlands DY5 4DZ

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	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Too many pupils are failing to reach the expected standard by the end of key stage 2. Progress in reading, writing and mathematics has been too low for the past three years.
- Leaders, including governors, have recently put in place several new initiatives. However, it is too early to see the full impact of this work on pupils' progress.
- Leaders' monitoring and evaluation are not sharp enough to ensure that all actions bring about the required improvement.
- Planning for pupils' progression in English and mathematics is limited. Teaching is not always matched well enough to pupils' learning needs.
- Leaders' use of the pupil premium funding has not made enough difference for disadvantaged pupils, particularly in reading and mathematics.
- Middle leaders who are new to role have gained an accurate understanding of the areas where improvement is needed. However, they lack some of the leadership skills required in leading their area of responsibility across the school.
- Attendance is improving due to careful tracking of individual pupils. However, it is still too low for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Teachers do not encourage pupils to apply their writing skills at greater length. Pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar are sometimes inaccurate.
- Pupils do not always know how to improve their work because they do not receive effective guidance from all teachers.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders now have a generally accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.
- The curriculum for foundation subjects is well planned through themes which are engaging and closely linked to the local area.
- Pupils' skills in reading are improving quickly.
- Pupils behave well. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years. Adults support them well to become confident, independent learners and children make good progress.
- Safeguarding is effective.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders, including governors, show greater urgency in addressing the priorities for improvement
 - monitoring information is used more strategically and action is taken to ensure that pupils make better progress
 - the skills of middle leaders are developed so that they can be more effective in improving teaching and pupil outcomes in their areas of responsibility
 - the pupil premium is used effectively to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - curriculum plans in English and mathematics enable teachers to use assessment information to plan activities that are more appropriately matched to pupils' learning needs
 - teachers encourage pupils to write at length and apply their skills in grammar, punctuation and spelling accurately
 - teachers give pupils guidance so that they know how to improve their work.
- Improve the attendance of pupils who are disadvantaged and those with SEND.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders, including governors, have been too slow to act to reverse the decline in standards since the last inspection. They have recently sought advice from the Diocese of Worcester and the local authority school improvement partner to identify the key priorities in order to improve. This support is effective and it has meant that several new initiatives have been put into place. However, it is too soon to see the full impact of this work on pupils' progress.
- Leaders have a generally accurate view of the quality of education. However, they are not systematic enough in analysing their monitoring information and then taking swift action to improve. The school's improvement plan is comprehensive and has rightly identified the main actions which will result in improvements. However, it does not, include measurable outcomes against the main actions, making it difficult for governors to hold leaders fully to account.
- Curriculum plans for English and mathematics do not allow teachers to have the flexibility to plan work in lessons which meets pupils' learning needs. The plans were put in place to raise expectations of what pupils can achieve. As a result, the more able pupils are now making better progress due to higher levels of challenge. However, middle- and lower-ability pupils have significant gaps in their skills and knowledge, which means that they need more structured approaches to support their learning. The current curriculum plans and teaching materials do not provide this support. Consequently, some pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Middle leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in their subject areas. However, they require further support to develop their leadership skills, as well as the opportunity to provide professional development for their colleagues, to help them make more rapid improvements in their subjects.
- Pupil premium funding has not been used effectively enough to improve the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. A recent pupil premium review has helped leaders and governors to identify more precisely the barriers to learning for this group as well as the actions needed. However, the impact of this funding on pupils' progress has not been evaluated effectively, and the majority of disadvantaged pupils are still underachieving.
- Leaders plan effective teaching to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. Additional funding is used well to provide speech and language support and training for teaching assistants to provide effective catch-up programmes in communication and reading. These are monitored carefully, using clear provision maps and individualised learning plans so that all staff understand what support these pupils need. This means that they make good progress.
- The curriculum for foundation subjects has been reviewed recently and is now taught through exciting themes, with careful plans to show progression in skills and knowledge in each subject. There is a clear rationale for the curriculum to make greater use of the local area, encourage pupils to gain a deeper understanding of their role as a citizen and to support their mathematics and English skills across all subjects. This means that pupils are now making good progress in the wider curriculum.

- Leaders communicate well with parents and carers, who speak highly of the care their children receive. One parent said that their child 'enjoys coming to school and comes out smiling every day'. The headteacher works closely with external agencies and St Mark's Church to provide high-quality support for vulnerable families. She has created a climate of trust and openness so that families receive strong support to enable their children to remain in school and to achieve well.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well through a focus on clear values, including friendship, respect and trust. The Christian ethos of the school is endorsed through close links with St Mark's Church, with regular assemblies and visits from church speakers. A beautiful reflection garden is at the heart of the school. Religious education lessons encourage the pupils to learn about other faiths and reflect through questions such as 'Why was the universe created?' and 'Why are Christians thankful to God?' This supports their spiritual development well.
- Leaders use the physical education (PE) and school sport premium well to employ specialist coaches and provide professional development for teachers. High-quality PE teaching was observed throughout the inspection. Leaders have also increased the range of sports available, including golf and archery. Leaders have purchased new kit so that pupils can attend more sporting competitions, where they are proud to represent their school. This means that sport has a higher profile in school and more pupils are engaging in regular daily activity.

Governance of the school

- The chair of governors clearly understands her role and responsibilities. She has recently taken effective action to work in partnership with external advisers to help the school to improve.
- Governors recognise the need to challenge and hold leaders to account for outcomes. They know the strengths and areas of development of the school and are clear about the actions needed to address these. They attend regular 'Governor days' and hold conferences with pupils and staff to find out information for themselves so that they can challenge leaders. However, the work of governors is not yet resulting in strong rates of progress for all pupils.
- Governors know how the pupil premium funding has been used. However, they have not focused sufficiently on the impact of this funding on standards.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Comprehensive training means that staff understand their roles. There are clear systems in place for raising concerns and making referrals, which are well known to all staff. Induction procedures are effective. Safer recruitment processes and pre-employment checks are rigorous.
- Staff work well with parents and react quickly to help pupils who may be vulnerable. They collaborate well with other agencies, particularly to support those pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment overall is not good enough. Teachers do not currently use assessment information flexibly enough in lessons to plan activities that are well matched to pupils' needs. This is because the curriculum design does not allow them the freedom to do this. This hinders pupils' progress.
- In the most effective lessons, teachers give clear guidance to pupils on how to improve. They make regular checks on learning, make good use of questioning and pick up on misconceptions quickly. This is not the case across the school and, in some classes, pupils do not receive the guidance they need so that they know how to improve their work. This means that pupils do not make good progress in all classes.
- Pupils collaborate well in the strongest lessons. They discuss their work and identify the most effective approach to a task. In a Year 6 poetry lesson, the teacher had high expectations of the class and pupils were highly engaged in developing verses for a performance poem called 'Worms'. In a Year 3/4 mixed-age class, pupils shared their ideas to create a newspaper report based on 'The Iron Man', helping each other to use more exciting vocabulary to make their work more engaging to a reader.
- Recent changes that leaders have made to the teaching of reading are effective. A new approach to teaching phonics, as well as the use of high-quality novels across the school, means that pupils' reading skills are improving quickly. This is also developing pupils' vocabulary. However, as some teachers do not have strong subject knowledge, it is too soon to see the full impact of this work on pupils' progress.
- In mathematics, teaching is not good enough in all classes. The school has reorganised teaching groups and purchased new materials. This approach is working well for the most able who are taught in separate groups. However, teaching for the middle- and low-ability groups is not effective as pupils are moved on too quickly before they have mastered important concepts, such as place value and fractions. In one lesson, pupils had to choose different methods to change fractions into decimals and some struggled to use basic place value or predict likely outcomes. As they may not have grasped previous concepts, this approach means that they cannot access new learning. Pupils' knowledge of times tables is poor in some classes. The use of mathematical vocabulary is not always accurate. This restricts pupils' progress further.
- Well-trained teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support pupils who need additional help and challenge. They use questioning well to encourage pupils to find answers for themselves. They lead groups in class and work in partnership with teachers to provide well-planned interventions for pupils who need help to catch up.
- Teaching of subjects across the wider curriculum is effective. This is because teachers have the flexibility, in subjects other than English and mathematics, to adapt plans to more closely meet pupils' learning needs. A recent review showed that not all subjects were being sufficiently covered and so a revised curriculum plan was produced to show what skills and knowledge must be taught across the school. Pupils now learn specific facts, such as 'Why were Roman roads important?' They make good use of the local area to develop their geographical skills. Consequently, pupils are now making good progress in history, geography, science and religious education.

- Pupils take pride in their work, and books are well presented. They do not always use their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills accurately enough and teachers are not always rigorous in checking this. Therefore, many pupils are not achieving the standard expected for their age in writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to support pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are confident and keen to learn.
- Attendance is lower than the national average. However, it is improving and is now much closer to the national average. The school works closely with external agencies to support families facing challenges. Leaders work closely with Dudley local authority education support services to keep pupils who are at risk of exclusion safe and in school. Attendance for pupils who are persistently absent, however, still needs to improve, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Peer supporters help them to resolve any issues, which they value. An effective teaching programme of e-safety takes place across the school each year. Incidents of bullying are tackled swiftly.
- Pupils have a good understanding of British values and they say that 'you must treat others as you want to be treated yourself.' Leaders ensure that they have interesting opportunities outside school, such as the Dudley Schools' Citizenship Debate, so that pupils can learn how to express themselves to an audience. They learn about democracy in the UK and listen to each other respectfully. This means that they understand how important it is to listen to the views of others to help avoid misunderstandings and conflict.

Behaviour

- Pupils behave well because all staff have clear expectations for conduct. They are polite, helpful and respectful of others.
- Relationships are strong at St Mark's. This means that pupils have good attitudes towards learning. They try hard in lessons and do not easily give up. They say that they like learning 'because it is hard'. They are proud to be at this school.
- The behaviour support assistant is highly valued by pupils, staff and parents, who know they can talk to her if they have any problems. Parents trust her to help them with issues at home that affect their children's access to education. This supports pupils' confidence and self-esteem so that they are better able to stay focused on learning.
- The school's behaviour policy is effective. Pupils like to see their names in the class 'Golden Book', which is displayed outside their classroom. Pupils wear their merit badges with pride. Incidents of poor behaviour are managed well, and pupils have the opportunity to reflect on their actions and make a fresh start each day. This reflective

approach to behaviour management means that incidents of low-level disruption are rare.

- Teachers and the behaviour support assistant support pupils with challenging behaviour well. Leaders provide appropriate adaptations to the curriculum as well as quiet spaces with sensory equipment to ensure that these pupils remain in school and continue to achieve well.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard for their age at the end of key stages 1 and 2 for the past three years has been well below that of all pupils nationally.
- Pupils' current work in their books varies in its quality. In some year groups, pupils are now making good progress, particularly in reading and mathematics. This is because of the increased focus on these subjects and the use of more effective teaching materials across the school.
- Disadvantaged pupils across the school make weaker progress than other pupils. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieved the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stages 1 and 2 was well below that of other pupils nationally.
- The most able pupils make good progress in their current work. This is because teaching has been reorganised to provide challenge for these groups. However, this has meant that the middle and low prior attaining groups do not always receive the support and guidance they need to make better progress.
- Current books show that pupils' knowledge and skills in subjects such as history and geography are well developed. This is because there is a clear overview in place for these subjects and teachers' planning meets pupils' learning needs more precisely.
- Pupils with SEND make better progress in almost all year groups. This is because leaders have identified their learning needs well and put effective support in place.
- The proportion of pupils who achieved the required standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2018 increased to be closer to the national average. The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who achieved the required standard also increased, but was still below that of other pupils. This means that standards in reading for current pupils are improving, particularly in Years 1 to 3.

Early years provision

Good

- Leaders have acted quickly in the early years to make changes that achieve better learning outcomes for the children. This is because teachers make effective use of assessment information to identify what the children need in order to make better progress.
- Leaders identified that achievement in reading and writing was not good enough and so implemented a new approach to teaching reading. They have introduced daily phonics teaching and new reading materials. This has been successful and standards in reading are improving quickly.

- Nursery provision has been reorganised so that children who are 'school-ready' receive teaching which is fun but challenging. Those children who are not yet ready for a more formal approach to learning are supported well with social skills groups in the afternoon sessions. This means that they enter Reception with the knowledge and skills needed to make good progress.
- In Reception, additional teaching assistants are deployed well to ensure that current pupils are supported effectively. Staff work together as a team to plan exciting activities which are focused on important skills in number, reading and writing. They intervene quickly when pupils need additional support. Consequently, outcomes for all pupils are improving and more children are ready for the next stage of their education in Year 1.
- More disadvantaged children achieved a good level of development at the end of 2018 than other children. The school has used additional funding well to provide extra staff to support these children and to ensure that their needs are met. This means that they get the help they need and so make better rates of progress.
- The learning environment is well structured. Children can easily access a wide range of well-organised resources. They are able to be independent and solve problems collaboratively, such as making a 'winter wonderland' with their friends.
- Well-trained staff are vigilant at keeping children safe. Welfare requirements are met.
- Staff work very closely with parents and have trialled a new approach to encourage them to join in with craft workshops, which also include sessions on phonics and early reading. Attendance at these sessions is much higher than in other year groups. Parents say that these workshops are accessible and so they attend on a regular basis because 'teachers are approachable' and the setting has a 'community, friendly feel'. This means that they feel well supported as partners in helping their children learn to read at home.

School details

Unique reference number	103836
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10082191

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	310
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jane Price
Headteacher	Carole Smith
Telephone number	01384 818935
Website	www.st-marks.dudley.sch.uk
Email address	info@st-marks.dudley.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 February 2015

Information about this school

- The school is a slightly larger than average primary school with a nursery on site.
- Almost three quarters of pupils are of White British heritage. The remainder come from a wide range of backgrounds. Few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and receive support from pupil premium funding is above average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above average.
- The school runs a breakfast club on site.
- The most recent section 48 SIAMS inspection took place in 2015.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed teaching and learning in 23 lessons across the school, some of which was carried out jointly with senior leaders. Samples of pupils' books were examined across the school.
- Inspectors met with a group of pupils to gain their views of the school. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour at social times as well as during lessons. Inspectors also listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including leaders' evaluations of the school, the school improvement plan, external reviews, information about pupils' achievement and progress, governing body records, checks and records relating to safeguarding and the school website.
- Inspectors spoke informally to parents to ask their views on the school. Twenty-three responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were also considered.
- Inspectors spoke to governors, a local authority representative, a representative from the Diocese of Worcester and to school staff throughout the inspection. Evidence from 23 staff questionnaires and seven pupil questionnaires were also considered.

Inspection team

Johanne Clifton, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Stuart Evans	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Hughes	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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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