

Mary Exton Primary School

St Michael's Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 0QA

Inspection dates

30–31 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

- The many changes in staffing have resulted in a decline in the quality of teaching. The current headteacher is addressing weaknesses effectively. However, teaching remains too variable.
- Governors have not checked how well additional funding is used. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged pupils do not make consistently good progress.
- Leaders have not ensured that all teachers use the school's assessment systems accurately.
- Some middle leaders and subject leaders are new to their role. They have not developed the skills to check teaching and secure improvement in some subjects across the curriculum.
- Pupils do not make consistently good progress in writing. They do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their writing skills across a range of subjects. Pupils' spelling is particularly weak.
- Teachers do not plan enough opportunities to deepen pupils' understanding in mathematics. Weak teaching in the past has resulted in gaps in pupils' knowledge.
- Some teachers do not plan effectively for how they will use teaching assistants in all parts of the lesson. Some do not have the understanding about how best to support the pupils they work with.
- Teachers do not routinely plan activities that are well matched to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. The most able pupils are not appropriately challenged to think deeply about their learning.

The school has the following strengths

- Since her arrival, the headteacher has set high expectations. She is passionate for the school's success and determined in her drive for improvement.
- The teaching of reading is effective. Pupils read widely and make good progress across the school.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning. They work hard and behave well.
- Provision in the early years is good. Teachers plan exciting activities that support children's good progress.
- Parents and carers are supportive and recognise the improvements made by the headteacher.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the leadership and management of the school by:
 - embedding the school’s systems for assessing pupils’ progress so that information is accurate and leaders use it effectively to check pupils’ progress
 - governors monitoring and challenging leaders about the way they use additional funding so that pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils make consistently good progress
 - further developing the monitoring and evaluative skills of middle and subject leaders to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and to support teachers to improve their practice.
- Improve the consistency of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, so raising pupils’ outcomes, by:
 - teachers using assessment information to plan activities that are well matched to meet the needs of all pupils, especially the most able
 - deploying teaching assistants effectively and developing their skills to improve the quality of support they provide for pupils
 - teachers embedding the school’s approaches for the teaching of writing, especially spelling, and increasing the opportunities for pupils to write in a range of subjects
 - ensuring that teachers make consistent use of reasoning to deepen pupils’ understanding of mathematical concepts.

An external review of the use of the pupil premium funding should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- There has been significant turbulence in staffing. This has led to a decline in the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils. Until recently, the capacity to improve the school was limited. However, a new leadership team has been established and is working hard to tackle identified weaknesses. Leaders' actions are starting to have a positive impact on improving the school's effectiveness.
- The current headteacher sets high expectations for staff and pupils. She provides a strong drive and is determined to improve the school. She is ably supported by the deputy headteacher, and a strong team ethic has developed. Staff feel well supported by the senior leaders and morale is high. However, new strategies to support improvement are not yet fully established, because many staff have only recently joined the school.
- Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They use this information effectively to target where support is required. For example, expertise from the local authority has been used well to support improvements in the teaching of mathematics. However, the constant changes of staff mean that the improvements have not been sustained.
- The headteacher has addressed many of the concerns about weaker leadership and teaching. Senior leaders make regular checks to ensure that teachers are making the improvements to their practice. There are still areas of the school where teaching is not yet strong enough. This means that the quality of teaching is not consistently good across the school.
- Leaders' systems to check pupils' progress are not understood by all teachers. This means the information they collect does not provide an accurate view about pupils' learning. Leaders do not know how well some pupils are achieving across the school.
- Middle and subject leaders are at the early stages of their leadership careers. They do not have a precise view of the quality of teaching in some subjects. Therefore, while some improvements have been made in teaching, leadership is not yet consistent to ensure that it is good across the all year groups.
- The new leader with responsibility for pupils with SEND has made a good start. Pupils' needs are assessed promptly, and targeted interventions introduced to help them to catch up. This is beginning to have a positive impact on their progress. Over time, many changes to the leadership in this role have resulted in limited progress for pupils with SEND.
- The evaluation of the use of pupil premium funding for disadvantaged pupils is not sufficiently thorough. Leaders, including governors, have not understood how funding is being used. While groups are small, plans have not been checked to see what difference the additional funding is making to removing barriers to learning. Under new leadership, new plans have been developed, and there is closer monitoring of pupils' progress. Inspection evidence shows that leaders' actions are starting to improve the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders have used the sport premium to increase the opportunities for pupils to

develop their fitness and participation in different sports. However, it is not possible to track the effectiveness of this spending, as there have been no specific plans for its use.

- The curriculum reflects leaders' aspirations to be 'inspirational, creative and caring'. It is broad and balanced, helping pupils to develop a range of skills. However, where new subject leaders have yet to develop their skills, the teaching of that subject has not been checked. In these subjects, pupils do not learn in sufficient depth, which limits the progress they make.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. Leaders provide a nurturing environment that builds pupils' confidence and well-being effectively. For example, newly created house teams provide pupils with a better understanding of community and how to work as a team.
- Pupils develop a good understanding of British values. They learn about different faiths and cultures. They readily share their own diverse experiences, reflecting the range of different backgrounds represented in the school. Pupils have a clear understanding of democracy and the rule of law. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Parents are highly supportive of the leadership provided by the current headteacher. They recognise that changes have been made for the better and that the school is improving. All parents who spoke to inspectors welcomed the good communication from leaders and accessibility of all the staff. A comment typical of many received on Parent View, the Ofsted online parent survey, stated: 'I have been incredibly impressed with the constant, gradual and well-thought-out improvements since the change in leadership team.'

Governance of the school

- Governors have used the support of the local authority well to help address the recent upheavals in leadership and staffing. However, their actions have been unable to prevent the decline in the school's performance since the previous inspection.
- Governors have not routinely checked how well leaders use the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils. Plans have not been evaluated, because leaders have changed. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils have not made strong gains from their starting points.
- New governors have improved the challenge they provide for school leaders. They are developing their skills through training. Governors are ensuring that there is a better level of expertise on the governing body, through recruiting new members. Governors are using the support of the local authority's action board to improve their understanding of the school's effectiveness. Their monitoring of the school's work is well planned. Governors' purposeful visits check the progress leaders are making towards achieving agreed targets. As a result, governors are asking challenging questions and holding school leaders to account for their actions to improve the school.
- Governors ensure that procedures for keeping pupils safe are effective. They visit the school regularly to check records and staff's understanding of safeguarding processes. This ensures pupils are safe in the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have established secure and comprehensive systems to ensure that pupils are safe in the school. Staff are well trained and updated regularly about any changes to safeguarding requirements. Leaders check that staff understand their roles through questions and briefings to ensure that they are vigilant to any issues. Staff understand how to use the school's procedures for recording concerns. Leaders monitor records closely and take action when appropriate. New staff receive immediate induction training, so that pupils are kept safe.
- Leaders make use of external agencies to provide additional support and help for vulnerable pupils and their families. They commission family liaison workers when required, and hold meetings to ensure that actions are targeted to meet pupils' needs.
- Leaders' records of the suitability of staff to work with children are maintained well. Governors and external bodies check safeguarding records and systems regularly. This ensures that systems are robust, and the culture of safeguarding is strong across the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good across the school. Over time, the teaching of writing and mathematics has not ensured pupils achieve high enough standards in these subjects.
- Not all teaching reflects the high standards demanded by senior leaders. While it is improving, some teaching does not build on the skills that pupils have already acquired. Consequently, the quality of pupils' work is not of the same standard in all year groups.
- Leaders have introduced schemes of learning to ensure that teachers plan activities at the right level. However, teachers do not always adapt tasks to meet the needs of all pupils in their class. The most able pupils often work through activities that do not challenge their thinking as quickly as they should. This limits the progress these pupils make.
- The teaching of writing is improving. Teachers make good use of modelling the learning to support pupils' ideas and understanding. They encourage pupils to develop their vocabulary through writing in a range of forms for different purposes. However, teachers do not have high expectations of pupils' spelling. Repeated errors are not addressed, especially when writing key words in topics. Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to practise their writing skills in a range of subjects. Consequently, they are not making consistently good progress in writing.
- Teaching in mathematics is addressing pupils' gaps in knowledge. Teachers plan regular opportunities to improve pupils' basic skills and recall of multiplication tables. Lessons provide pupils with opportunities to practise skills of calculation. There are fewer opportunities to deepen pupils' understanding through reasoning. As a result, challenge is not consistent in all lessons, especially for the most able pupils.
- The use of teaching assistants is variable across the school. Where targeted

interventions provide precise instructions for teaching assistants, their support is more effective. However, some teaching assistants focus on an activity to be completed rather than the skills pupils are learning. This limits the progress pupils make during these sessions.

- The teaching of phonics is effective in helping to develop pupils' early reading skills. Pupils use their knowledge of phonics well to tackle unfamiliar words and apply them to their writing. For example, children in the Reception class used their knowledge of sounds to make captions and titles for the food they had made from moulding materials.
- Teachers ensure that pupils read widely and often. Pupils told inspectors about the range of texts they read and opportunities to share class books. Pupils read fluently and use the texts to develop their skills of inference and retrieval of key information effectively. The progress pupils make in reading is improving across the school.
- Pupils told inspectors that they receive regular homework. They enjoy the opportunities to select the work they do over a period of time. This helps to develop a range of learning skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils say that their school is friendly and everyone respects one another regardless of their background. They willingly share ideas and work together well in lessons. Leaders have introduced a house system to develop pupils' sense of community and team work. Pupils develop collaborative skills by working towards common aims. For example, house teams were preparing for a singing performance, celebrating how together they were stronger.
- Staff have created a nurturing environment that develops pupils' confidence and well-being. They provide opportunities for pupils to identify a network of people in the school that they can turn to if they have any concerns. Positive relationships between adults and pupils foster good attitudes to learning. Many parents who commented on Ofsted's parent survey agreed that this is a caring and inclusive school. One such comment said: 'There is a strong sense of community and for me one of the most positive aspects is how children in different year groups know, take care and are kind to each other.'
- Pupils undertake different roles and responsibilities. As members of the school council or as house captains, they develop the skills of leadership and care, which staff promote successfully. Other pupils have 'buddy' roles to ensure that younger children are safe and cared for at lunchtimes. Pupils have a good understanding of the different forms of bullying. While they say it may happen on a few occasions, they know that adults will resolve any concerns quickly. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, especially when using the internet. Pupils are well prepared for life in their own and the wider community.
- Through the wider curriculum, pupils have opportunities to undertake visits and trips.

They participate in different clubs that help develop their sporting and creative skills.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well, ensuring that the school is calm and orderly. They are polite and well mannered and respond quickly to adults' instructions. Pupils are clear about the rules of the school, which are promoted through shared values. They understand that people are different but that should not affect the way we behave towards each other. As one pupil told an inspector: 'Everyone is treated fairly in this school.'
- Pupils are keen to learn. They sustain their attention in lessons and respond enthusiastically to any questions asked by teachers. Even where work is not always challenging, they are eager to complete tasks. Pupils are proud of their work. This is seen in pupils' books, where standards of presentation are consistently good in all subjects.
- The attendance of pupils is consistently above the national average. Leaders check attendance information and work with families where they identify any concerns about a pupil's attendance. Consequently, leaders have sustained high rates of attendance for all groups of pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The progress of current pupils is variable. Evidence from pupils' books and observations of lessons show that progress is stronger where teaching has been consistent. It is weaker where year groups have been affected by regular changes in teaching. Some of the improvement in progress is only recent, and many pupils are behind where they should be, given their starting points.
- In 2018, at the end of key stage 2, the proportions of pupils who attained the expected and higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics (combined) were below the national averages. This is because pupils did not attain well in both writing and mathematics. The progress pupils made in writing was well below the national average in both 2017 and 2018.
- At key stage 1, the proportions of pupils who attained expected standards and greater depth in mathematics were below the national average in both 2017 and 2018. However, the proportion of pupils attaining expected standards in reading and writing in 2018 improved from the previous year.
- The most able pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. The activities planned by teachers do not challenge them to think hard about their learning.
- While numbers are small, pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils have not made sufficient progress over time. The targeted interventions that have been introduced recently are now improving the progress of pupils with SEND. However, leaders have only just started to identify actions and address the barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils. This means that their impact upon pupils' progress is not yet consistent.

- Pupils' progress in writing is inconsistent. The new strategies to improve pupils' writing are not embedded. Where teaching is stronger, pupils are improving their writing skills. Progress is weaker where pupils are not using their writing skills in a range of subjects.
- Current pupils are making better progress in mathematics. Pupils are developing their fluency through additional activities provided by teachers. This is helping them to address gaps in their knowledge and catch up in their learning.
- Pupils read with good expression and fluency. They enjoy their reading and select books from a wide range of genres. This is helping pupils to develop their language skills and to tackle more challenging texts. In 2018, the proportion of pupils who attained the expected standard by the end of Year 6 was above the national average.
- Pupils develop a broad range of skills from the subjects they study across the curriculum. They make good progress in science, where they have opportunities to develop their skills of enquiry and investigation. In other subjects, the most able pupils are not appropriately challenged by the activities that are given to them.

Early years provision

Good

- The majority of children start the early years with skills that are typical for their age. From these starting points, they make good progress so that, by the end of Reception, the proportion of children who achieve a good level of development is above the national average. This means they are well prepared for their transition into key stage 1.
- The leader of the early years is knowledgeable about the early years curriculum. She makes regular checks on the quality of the provision. Guidance is provided to staff to ensure that that good standards are sustained.
- Teachers make assessments of children's learning to help plan for their needs. Their learning journeys capture children's development from a range of activities. Staff use assessment information well to plan activities where children need more help. For example, there has been a greater focus on developing writing for boys by encouraging them to write labels for things that they construct.
- Adults provide a secure and nurturing environment for the children. They have high expectations of how children should behave and provide clear routines and systems. This ensures that children settle quickly and develop their confidence and independence. For example, on entering the classroom in the morning, children use their name tags to select their own choice of lunch by placing them on a board.
- The learning environment is well planned. Children use the activities effectively to develop their interests and understanding of the world. Adults model play well, so that children benefit from the opportunities to rehearse their understanding through their own chosen activities. For example, while an adult played the part of Goldilocks in the house of the three bears, children developed a better understanding of order by making different-sized bowls of porridge.
- The outdoor environment provides opportunities for children to develop their physical skills, for example through their use of trikes and scooters. Adults use current events well to promote children's curiosity. For example, following a sharp frost, adults

encouraged children to investigate and explain why the water had turned to ice and to describe different frozen shapes found in the water tray.

- The partnership between parents and adults is highly effective. Staff encourage parents to spend time in the provision, so that children can share their learning. Parents contribute to the learning journeys by completing 'wow' moments when children achieve different things at home. Parents told inspectors that they receive good information from leaders and that they are happy with the start their child has made at school.
- Leaders ensure that the statutory requirements for safeguarding and the welfare of children are met.

School details

Unique reference number	117329
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10053040

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Co-Chairs	Karen Gordon/Sue Hughes
Headteacher	Angharad Paterson
Telephone number	01462 456997
Website	www.maryexton.herts.sch.uk
Email address	admin@maryexton.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 February 2018

Information about this school

- There have been several changes in the position of headteacher, including a period of interim headship, since the previous section 5 inspection. The current headteacher started in April 2017.
- The governing body has co-chairs.
- The school is average in size.
- The majority of pupils are White British. Others come from a range of different ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium funding is below the national average.

- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below the national average.
- The school uses an outsider provider to run a breakfast club and an after-school club on site.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of classes and part lessons across the school. A number of these visits were undertaken jointly with senior leaders. During observations, inspectors sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and the deputy headteacher, who also has other leadership roles, including early years leader and special educational needs coordinator. Inspectors also met with the leader of the pupil and sport premium funding, who is also the headteacher. Inspectors held meetings with middle and subject leaders. Inspectors had discussions with a group of pupils, four governors including the co-chairs, and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a sample of pupils' books from key stage 1 and key stage 2 which covered the breadth of the curriculum. Inspectors listened to some pupils read and talked to them about their books.
- Inspectors observed pupils at playtime and lunchtime and observed their behaviour and conduct around the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, policies, assessment information and records of checks on the quality of teaching. Inspectors also looked at records of attendance and behaviour and safeguarding information.
- Inspectors met with parents at both the beginning and the end of the day to gather their views. Inspectors took account of the 97 responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View. In addition, the inspectors took account of the 21 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 21 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sue Pryor

Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

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.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2019