

Wisbech St Mary CofE Academy

Church Road, Wisbech St Mary, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire PE13 4RJ

Inspection dates

10–11 July 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
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	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is too variable, particularly at key stage 2. Pupils are starting to make better progress, but the legacy of weaker teaching has left significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding.
- Not all teachers have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve in their learning. This limits the progress pupils make.
- In 2018, pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics combined was well below the national average at both expected and/or greater depth.
- Pupils do not have sufficient understanding of fluency in mathematics. This means that they lack confidence when tackling problem-solving activities.
- Teachers do not build successfully on pupils' early reading skills. Older pupils do not read widely to develop their fluency and enjoyment of reading.
- Some teachers do not provide enough opportunities to improve pupils' subject-specific vocabulary. This means that pupils do not have the language skills to explain their thinking.
- Writing is improving. However, pupils' progress is hampered by weak spelling, grammar and punctuation skills.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has set high expectations. She leads the school with passion and determination. She has empowered leaders and rapid improvement is being made.
- A nurturing environment supports pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning.
- The Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust (DEMAT) has provide effective support for the recent rapid improvement of the school.
- Effective teaching of phonics supports pupils well in developing their early reading skills.
- Children make a good start to their education in the newly extended early years provision.
- Leaders are developing an exciting curriculum. Teachers plan activities that engage pupils in their learning and develops their range of creative, technical and scientific skills.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils make consistently good progress and attainment improves by ensuring that:
 - teachers set high expectations for what pupils achieve by planning activities that consistently challenge them in their learning
 - pupils become fluent in their mathematics and confidently apply their skills to reasoning and problem-solving activities
 - teachers improve pupils' understanding and use of essential vocabulary in the subjects that they are taught
 - pupils read widely and for pleasure to improve their fluency and expression
 - teachers develop pupils' knowledge of spelling, grammar and punctuation and that they check that these skills are applied consistently by pupils in all their writing.
- Further improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that teaching is consistently strong in all year groups.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since her appointment, the new headteacher has been unwavering in her ambition to ensure that the quality of education is the best it can be. The fresh vision provided by the headteacher has invigorated the leadership team. Their work is now purposeful and new strategies to secure improvement are being established throughout the school. Leaders demonstrate a clear capacity and knowledge about what needs to be done to ensure that pupils make stronger progress.
- The support of the trust has been effective and has made a strong contribution to the school's rapid improvement. They have understood the needs of the leaders and ensured that appropriate training and expertise has been provided. For example, during a period of staff absence, the trust made use of its own leaders to ensure that the quality of provision was sustained in the early years.
- Leaders know the school well. They regularly monitor the quality of teaching and provide teachers with clear guidance on how to improve. However, not all leaders provide clear expectations for when improvements should be made. This means that while it is getting better, teaching is not yet consistently strong.
- Leaders have been successful in uniting the staff and creating a team culture. Staff are positive about the training they receive and how they are encouraged to participate in school improvement. As one member of staff explained, 'Leaders value and listen to our opinions.' All staff who responded to the online survey said they were proud to work at the school. Consequently, morale is high.
- The headteacher has worked effectively to engage parents and gain their trust and confidence. Many parents are pleased about the new approaches the headteacher has introduced. One parent said, reflecting the views of other parents, that, 'The headteacher is a wonderful addition to the school.'
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) gives effective support for class teachers and ensures that extra programmes to help pupils make progress are taught well. She identifies additional teaching opportunities for pupils who struggle to grasp new concepts to help them keep up with their peers. Plans for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are clear and concise. They are reviewed regularly to check that pupils with SEND achieve their targets.
- A high proportion of pupils in the school are eligible for pupil premium funding. Following her arrival, the headteacher reviewed the strategy for the use of the pupil premium funding. There is now an improved understanding of the barriers to pupils' learning. A more focused approach is used to support pupils' social and academic achievement. Early indications from the school's own information show that disadvantaged pupils are now making better progress than their peers.
- The physical education (PE) and sport premium is used effectively to increase pupils' participation in PE. Leaders have carried out a review of teachers' training needs and are ensuring that the funding is used to develop their subject expertise. This means that pupils have access to a wide range of sporting activities which include games, gymnastics and dance.

- Leaders are developing the curriculum in a thoughtful way to meet the needs of pupils at Wisbech St Marys. New approaches to the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics have been introduced and are helping to engage pupils of all ages. Learning across the wider curriculum is well sequenced and placed within a purposeful context. For example, Year 3 pupils developed a good understanding of the Stone Age through their trip to a local archaeology park; writing their own accounts of life in the Stone Age and using their creative skills to make clay pots and recreate pictures of Stonehenge. Consequently, pupils are making a good start in developing their knowledge and understanding across a wide range of subjects.
- The school's values, 'ready, respectful and safe' permeate school life. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on these values to support their own attitudes and conduct. Regular reference is made to the school values which helps to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is a strength of the school.

Governance of the school

- The trust's effective support has helped the local governing board to improve their understanding of how to hold leaders to account. The trust's model of joint governance has provided additional capacity and expertise where it has been difficult to recruit new members. They seek advice and make use of external reports to build their understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.
- The members of the local governing board are committed and share leaders' high aspirations for pupils' achievement. They demonstrate this ambition through governors' meetings. The questions they ask probe the impact of leaders' actions to improve the school. They make use of the information provided by school leaders to help identify further ways of monitoring the school's performance. Their visits to the school are recorded using consistent formats so that next steps are discussed as part of their meetings.
- Governors fulfil their legal responsibilities including regular checks to ensure that safeguarding procedures and systems are effective.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding to ensure that pupils feel safe and well cared for while at school. Leaders are mindful of the challenges some pupils face regarding their social and emotional well-being. The high priority which leaders place on supporting pupils' mental well-being is reflected through regular teaching and leadership provided by an assistant headteacher.
- Staff are well trained and understand how to identify any concerns where pupils may be at risk of harm. There are many reminders around the school regarding adults' responsibilities for ensuring that pupils are kept safe. Leaders' systems for recording concerns and then acting are strong. Leaders effectively use the school's electronic recording system to identify any trends or patterns that may alert them to any issues regarding pupils' safety. Leaders are tenacious in pursuing courses of action when referrals are made. This means that vulnerable pupils and their families receive the support they require.

- Leaders' processes for checking the suitability of adults to work in the school are secure and meet the legal requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment at key stage 2 is inconsistent. Weaknesses in teaching over time have led to low achievement from pupils' starting points. Consequently, there are now gaps in some pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Senior leaders have identified where teaching is not consistent. They are clear about what improvements are needed. Professional development and coaching are provided to help teachers improve their practice. The support that has been given is ensuring that teaching is now improving. However, the improvements are not yet established so that teaching leads to stronger outcomes.
- Where teaching is weaker, expectations are too low. In these cases, the tasks set by teachers do not require pupils to think hard about their learning. Pupils are not consistently challenged and too much time is spent repeating skills that pupils have already learned. This means that some pupils are not producing the standard of work of which they are capable.
- In stronger teaching, effective use is made of questioning to check pupils understanding and address misconceptions. However, not all teachers have developed the depth of subject knowledge to probe pupils' responses and move them on quickly in their learning. This limits the progress pupils make in their learning.
- Teachers' use of subject-specific vocabulary is not consistent. Where pupils' language is developed well, teachers encourage pupils to consider a range of words and alternatives that improve their writing. For example, in a Year 2 class the teacher shared pupils' instructions for making 'disgusting sandwiches'. Her questions focused on the strengths of the writing to help support pupils with improving their choice and use of vocabulary. At other times, teachers readily accept subject vocabulary that is too simplistic and pupils' language skills are not developed strongly.
- The teaching of writing is improving. Teachers use their planned topics to provide writing activities that have a meaningful context. This means that pupils are writing in a range of forms and for different purposes to develop their skills. However, teachers do not have consistent expectations for pupils' use of spelling, grammar and punctuation. Where it is weaker, pupils do not receive sufficient guidance on how to check for errors and refine their work.
- In the teaching of mathematics, pupils are starting to make use of their reasoning skills through problem-solving activities. This is helping to secure their understanding. The legacy of weaker teaching means that pupils, especially in key stage 2, have significant gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Pupils are not yet fluent enough in their mathematical knowledge to apply their skills and tackle problems confidently.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. Reading books are well matched to pupils' phonic knowledge. Pupils use the sounds they have learned to read and write unfamiliar words. Teachers are making use of high-quality class texts to develop pupils' reading skills. These texts link to class topics and pupils enjoy reading them. However, older

pupils are not yet fluent readers. This is because not all pupils read widely and develop their love of reading.

- Teachers make good use of their topics to plan interesting activities. The work on the curriculum is developing. Where it is taught well pupils make links in their learning and deepen their knowledge across different subjects.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have positive relationships with pupils. Pupils respond well to adults' direction. This supports pupils' good attitudes to learning. Teaching assistants use their skills effectively to check the understanding of pupils and ensure that resources are used well to help pupils in their learning.

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 proud of their school. They are eager to tell visitors about the different things they are learning, especially where they have participated in trips and visits to various places of interest. As one pupil told an inspector when asked what is good about the school, she simply replied, 'Everything.'
- The school values are meaningful to pupils. They are at the heart of the school. Pupils understand how the values are reflected through their relationships with one another. The values are evident in pupils' respect of each other especially where there are different groups represented in the school such as those from the Gypsy/Roma community. One pupil who spoke with inspectors said, 'We are all different, but it doesn't matter where you are from in this school.'
- Pupils have opportunities to undertake different roles and responsibilities. Ideas of democracy and tolerance are promoted through school captains and working on the school council. Pupils consider others through their fundraising activities or make decisions about things that affect their life in school. In this way pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school has a nurturing ethos. All staff are committed to supporting pupils' welfare. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and consider that bullying is rare. If they had any concerns they are confident that these would be resolved by the adults who look after them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Since her arrival, the headteacher has worked hard to ensure that staff set high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Behaviour systems are used consistently across the school. Leaders make regular checks of their recorded information to respond quickly to concerns and ensure that good levels of behaviour are maintained.
- Pupils are friendly, polite and welcoming. They move around the school in an orderly manner. They are courteous to one another, such as by holding doors open and thanking each other for acts of kindness. In classrooms, pupils listen attentively to their

teachers and do not become too restless when the activities are not engaging.

- Pupils' attendance is below the national average. Attendance is now carefully monitored. Leaders are clear about their expectations for pupils' attendance. Weekly prizes are rewarded for good and improving attendance. There is regular reference in newsletters about the importance of coming to school frequently. Leaders act swiftly to address any concerns by working with parents. Pupils' attendance is now improving rapidly.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- At the end of Year 6 in 2018 some groups of pupils did not make the progress they should have in reading, writing and mathematics. Previous weaknesses in teaching meant that pupils were not sufficiently challenged to make consistent progress across key stage 2. Pupils' attainment in reading, writing and mathematics combined at the end of Year 6 was below the national averages at the both expected and higher standards.
- New leadership has halted the decline in outcomes and made sure that the progress pupils make in key stage 2 is improving. However, this is not yet consistent, and leaders are still addressing a legacy of underachievement. Consequently, progress is too variable across different year groups in reading, writing and mathematics from pupils' starting points.
- At the end of key stage 1 in 2018, pupils' attainment was above the national averages at expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. It was also above the national averages at greater depth in writing and mathematics. Current pupils in key stage 1 continue to make consistently strong progress from their starting points.
- The proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2018 was above the national average. Inspection evidence shows that pupils continue to make good progress in their early reading and writing skills because phonics is well taught.
- Not enough pupils attain the higher standards in reading and mathematics or greater depth in writing at the end of key stage 2. Leaders are working with teachers to develop higher expectations. However, there is not sufficient challenge provided for pupils to think deeply about their learning so that they achieve the higher standards.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving. Close monitoring of their specific needs is ensuring that they receive support that is starting to diminish the differences in their learning.

Pupils with SEND are supported well. Adults who provide additional support have received training to help pupils with SEND successfully achieve their targets and make good progress.

Early years provision

Good

- Children enter the early years with skills that are below those typical for their age. From these low starting points children make strong progress. The proportion of

children achieving a good level of development is consistently above the national average. This means that children are well prepared for Year 1.

- The trust has provided additional support during a period of staff absence. The support has been used well to ensure continuity in the provision and sustaining the good outcomes.
- Some children have poor communication and language skills when they join the pre-school or Reception class. Leaders ensure that additional opportunities are created to support children's development in this area of learning. A language-rich environment provides children with essential vocabulary that is modelled by the adults. Children are encouraged to talk about their learning and describe their experiences. For example, one child was encouraged to talk about the magic potions she was making through sensitive prompting and questioning by an adult.
- Leaders have made effective use of additional funding to develop a specific language programme. Practitioners identify those children who require support through their accurate assessments. They provide teaching to support children's speech, helping them to catch up quickly.
- Leaders have established clear routines that help children settle and feel secure. Children's confidence is developed through effective relationships that they enjoy with one another and adults. The play together well because they are taught how to listen and communicate their feelings. This makes a strong contribution to children's social and emotional development.
- The learning environment is planned effectively. Adults model play well so that children benefit from the opportunities to develop their interests and understanding of the world. For example, a theme of 'The Ugly Bug Ball' provided opportunities for children to make connections in their learning whether observing insects, creating models of minibeasts or applying their early writing skills to record their findings.
- Leaders have established effective partnerships with parents. They provide parents with important moments of learning by sharing these through the school's online assessment system. Strong links are fostered through informative events such as story cafes. Parents are encouraged to visit the provision regularly so that they can share their children's learning and help to support their children at home.
- Safeguarding practices are effective. Children learn how to manage risk through activities such as use of a small woodland on the school site. The legal requirements for supporting children's welfare are met.

School details

Unique reference number	142810
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10088630

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

Type of school	All-through Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	183
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Julie Coales
Headteacher	Jaynie Lynch
Telephone number	01945 410312
Website	www.wsmacademy.co.uk
Email address	office@wsmacademy.cambs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust which it joined on 1 September 2016. Some responsibility for governance is delegated to a local governing board. The trust has its own representative on the local governing board.
- The school is an average-sized primary school.
- The new headteacher was appointed in September 2018.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage and a small minority are from a settled community of Gypsy/Roma families.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium funding is in the top 20% of schools nationally.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND and those with an education, health and care plan is below the national average.

- The school is responsible for managing the breakfast and after-school clubs on the school site.
- Due to its religious character, in September of 2016, the school underwent an inspection under section 48 of the relevant education act. The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the distinctiveness and effectiveness of the school as a church school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons across a range of subjects in the early years and key stages 1 and 2. Some observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher and the assistant headteachers.
- During visits to lessons, inspectors spoke with pupils and looked at work in pupils' books to find out more about how well they are learning.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, middle leaders, the early years leader, and the SENCo. Meetings were also held with the newly qualified teacher and those responsible for safeguarding and the school business manager.
- The lead inspector met with DEMAT's director of schools and the local governing board, including the chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors took into account 29 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and 20 texts from parents. There were 21 responses to the staff questionnaire and nine responses to the pupil survey.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils formally and informally in the classroom about their learning.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation provided by the school, including the school's self-evaluation and plans for improvement. Information was scrutinised regarding behaviour and attendance logs, safeguarding information and governors' minutes of their meetings.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jenny Carpenter

Ofsted Inspector

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