

Inspection of a good school: Mark First and Pre-School CE Academy

The Causeway, Mark, Highbridge, Somerset TA9 4QA

Inspection dates: 10 October 2019

Outcome

Mark First and Pre-School Church of England Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Mark First and Pre-school is a warm and welcoming school. Staff are dedicated and want the best for every pupil. Since September 2019, the school has a new head of school and executive headteacher, as well as new teachers. However, everyone has worked effectively so that these changes have been seamless. The same strong caring ethos and high expectations for all pupils are being well maintained. Leaders have settled quickly. They are building well on the previous strengths of the school.

Pupils feel happy and safe. From their start in pre-school, children learn to be kind and respectful. They like to have roles or jobs that teach them to be caring citizens. For example, some older pupils have responsibility for e-safety, while children in the pre-school learn much from caring for their chickens.

Pupils' behaviour is good. Pupils said there is no bullying. Virtually all parents and carers who responded to Parent View would recommend the school. A typical response described a 'school with the children at its heart'.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders are taking the right steps to keep improving the school. The recently appointed executive headteacher and head of school have quickly gained an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Multi-academy trust leaders play a key role in nurturing leadership across the trust. This has worked well at Mark First and Pre-school, so that leaders are knowledgeable and confident. For example, effective leadership of special educational needs ensures high-quality support, both for pupils and for teachers. This means that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well cared for and achieve well. In addition, local governors undertake worthwhile visits to check how well different aspects of the school are performing. Together, leaders form an effective team for school improvement.

Leaders make sure that pupils receive a good quality of education. Pupils are well

prepared for their next stage, including children in the early years. Leaders have undertaken a review of what the school teaches. This means that subjects are planned so that pupils acquire knowledge well as they move through the school. There are some notable strengths, such as in music. For example, Year 3 pupils have a go at playing the violin and cello. This adds to the wider experiences and enjoyment of pupils at school. This is supplemented by the school's trips and visits, such as to Greatwood in Years 3 and 4, which deepen pupils' personal, social and moral development.

However, leaders recognise that there is still more that can be done to improve the curriculum further. On occasion, the ways that knowledge is linked leads to a lack of coherence in or between subjects. For example, an introduction to insects in the early years gave the wrong scientific information about different animal groups, even though this was in a phonics lesson when children were being introduced to the 'i' sound (for insects).

Leaders strongly promote reading in the school. This is at the heart of the curriculum and leaders' intent. Pupils are encouraged to read for many different reasons. They enjoy learning about different authors, such as Iva Ibbotson. By the time pupils leave the school, they have a bank of positive experiences that help them to read and enjoy books. The school has a clear approach to teaching phonics. Overall, this is working well. However, despite knowing which pupils have fallen behind, teachers do not plan the next steps for these pupils precisely enough. This means that some of them do not catch up quickly.

Both the pre-school and Reception areas are thriving, bustling places. Staff plan activities that motivate and inspire the children. Staff have high expectations. These are reinforced through clear daily routines. For example, during snack in the pre-school, children learn about numbers and practice counting to three with a real-life purpose. Children sit and take turns well to collect their food and tidy away. Staff also make sure that the needs of the two- and three-year-olds are well catered for. The youngest children can play, rest or sleep in a safe environment, but one that can challenge them in equal measure.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained and know how to keep pupils safe. This includes leaders who work closely with a range of external agencies when this is needed. Leaders take prompt and effective action to act in the best interests of pupils.

Pupils trust staff. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in different situations, for example when working online. Support and care are provided for pupils and families by the ELSA (emotional literacy support assistant), who provides individual intervention to help pupils and families.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have taken steps to revise and redesign the school's curriculum. They are aware of the few remaining areas to develop, particularly to ensure that knowledge is well sequenced for all pupils over time. Leaders need to clearly plot or link the core knowledge that they expect pupils to remember and be able to use in the range of subjects.
- Leaders ensure that there is a well-understood approach to phonics in the school. However, there are weaknesses in how well teachers plan the next steps to help pupils who have fallen behind. Leaders need to ensure that these pupils receive the precise and ambitious support they need to catch up.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Mark Church of England VC First School, to be good on 11–12 October 2012.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	143332
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10111582
Type of school	First
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	146
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Brian Kirkup
Headteacher	Fiona Robertson (executive headteacher)
Website	www.markfirstschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- A new head of school and executive headteacher both started in September 2019.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has converted to become an academy. It joined the Wessex Learning Trust in October 2016.
- The school has on-site provision for two- and three-year-olds through its pre-school.
- The school has a Christian character. It is part of the Diocese of Bath and Wells. In its last section 48 SIAMs (Statutory inspection of Anglican and Methodists schools) inspection on 5 July 2016, the school was rated outstanding.
- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. It is a first school, meaning that pupils leave at the end of Year 4.

Information about this inspection

- We met with trust and school leaders, including: the executive headteacher, head of school and the trust's chief executive officer; representatives of the trust board and local governing body, including the chair of the governing board.
- We worked closely with curriculum leaders, such as the English subject leader and the SENCo (special educational needs coordinator). Leaders joined inspectors on lesson visits. The inspectors also met with pupils to talk about their learning and take account

of their views of bullying and safeguarding.

- We also scrutinised information relating to safeguarding, such as the school's single central register, risk assessments and pupils' individual health plans.
- One inspector met with parents. Furthermore, the 62 responses to Parent View (and free-text messages) were fully considered as part of the inspection. Inspectors also met with staff, including the newly qualified teachers, to evaluate staff workload and well-being.
- The inspection focused on reading, mathematics and science through deep dive activities. The lead inspector also took note of other subjects being taught, such as music.
- An inspector spent time and met staff in the early years foundation stage (EYFS), including the pre-school, as part of the inspection.

Inspection team

Stewart Gale, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Brown

Ofsted Inspector

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