

Inspection of a good school: St Margaret's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School Toppesfield

Church Lane, Toppesfield, Halstead, Essex CO9 4DS

Inspection dates:

22 October 2019

Outcome

St Margaret's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School Toppesfield continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders ensure that pupils are safe at St Margaret's Primary School. Pupils are happy, polite and well mannered. They told inspectors that they are safe, and parents and carers agree. Pupils say that behaviour is mostly good in school, and adults sort out any issues. Pupils enjoy school, particularly physical education, art, English and mathematics. Pupils spoken with in key stage 2 were thoughtful and reflective about their learning. They were keen to share their study of different religions and spoke about how Buddhism taught them that 'you don't need a lot of things to be happy'. They spoke about different cultures and beliefs and said that anyone was welcome at their school. Parents are also positive about the school staff and the strong communication between school and home.

However, pupils at St Margaret's do not achieve as well as they should. This is particularly the case in phonics and reading. Most pupils in Year 1, last year, did not reach the expected standard in the phonics screening check, and pupils in Year 6 did not make good enough progress in reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, many pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 did not attain as well as they should have in these subjects.

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

Leaders are currently developing the school's curriculum for all subjects. The headteacher has accurately identified the weaknesses. She has made sure that improving standards in reading and mathematics is a high priority. The mathematics curriculum is already addressing the gaps identified by leaders since the start of the school year. Teaching focuses on developing pupils' arithmetic and number skills. Inspectors observed that in key stage 2, mathematics teaching is organised well so that there is clear progression from year to year. Pupils in these classes are reflective. They talk about their progress and

what helps them to learn. In Years 3 and 4, pupils talked about how they use resources to help them 'visualise' complex mathematical problems. They also spoke about how their teacher helps them to attempt more difficult tasks. In Years 5 and 6, pupils were testing out mathematical ideas. They were making connections with what they already knew and developing their own strategies to solve problems. In other year groups, teachers do not consider what pupils already know. As a result, these pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Reading is central to the school's overarching curriculum. In key stage 2, teachers choose class books to help develop aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. They teach this through carefully planned history topics. For example, pupils learn about the life of Alan Turing, making connections through their learning in computing and history. Pupils learn about the struggles experienced by Jewish children in Poland at the time of the war.

Additional adults support the few pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to fully access the curriculum alongside their classmates. Leaders are clear about what they want pupils to learn and know by the time they leave. However, leaders have not yet detailed this clearly across year groups for the full range of subjects.

Pupils enjoy talking about what they are learning in history. Parents say that their children enthusiastically explore topics further at home. Where the teaching of reading is strong, pupils are enthusiastic about their reading. In key stage 2, pupils read fluently, and weaker readers use their phonics knowledge to sound out words confidently. However, this is not the case in all classes. Pupils listened to in Year 2 struggled to read many three-letter words from their reading books and yet were able to sight-read trickier words. This is because their reading books are too difficult for them to read. This shows significant gaps in their phonics knowledge. The new headteacher is addressing this weakness with extreme urgency.

The writing curriculum is not fully in place. Consequently, there is a lack of consistency in teachers' expectations of what pupils can do. In Reception, children start early by practising letter formation. Some children are already writing short sentences independently. However, pupils do not continue this learning well enough into key stage 1. In some year groups, pupils do not get to practise accurately forming letters, joining handwriting and writing neatly on lines. In addition, in some year groups, it is unclear what teachers want pupils to learn.

Governors know what the school needs to do to improve. The local authority is supporting school leaders and governors to access quality resources to help them move forward quickly. This is particularly in relation to improving phonics and mathematics. Governors have reviewed their practice and are now ensuring that their systems for checking school leaders' work are rigorous.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The headteacher attends local safeguarding forums to ensure that her own knowledge is up to date. Staff have received the necessary training to help identify pupils at risk from radicalisation and gang activity known as county lines. Pupils trust the teachers to sort out any worries they may have and say that bullying is rare. Leaders ensure that the curriculum enables pupils to gain an age-appropriate understanding of how to stay safe, including when using the internet. Leaders and governors make sure that the school's records of pre-employment checks and employee files are suitably maintained and contain all statutory information.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders are developing the curriculum to support the teaching of reading and mathematics. However, all teaching staff are not implementing this effectively. For example, reading is not given a high enough priority by all teachers. In addition, not all teachers consider pupils' starting points when planning mathematics activities. Leaders of these subjects are ensuring that appropriate staff training is in place to ensure that pupils in these year groups catch up quickly in reading and mathematics.
- Phonics is not taught well. Pupils are not sufficiently prepared for reading when they leave Year 2. As a matter of urgency, leaders should ensure that training for adults is in place to make sure that pupils are where they need to be by the time they leave key stage 1.
- Teachers' expectations of the quality of pupils' writing are inconsistent. Presentation of pupils' work varies too much across year groups. Also, in some classes, leaders have not specified what leaders want pupils to learn. Leaders are addressing this and developing a logically sequenced writing curriculum that sets high expectations for what pupils can achieve and how they present their work. This work should continue.
- The school's curriculum for subjects other than English and mathematics is still being reviewed and designed. In some subjects, leaders have not made clear what they want pupils to know over the course of their primary education. Pupils enjoy their history topics and some teachers are helping pupils make connections by building on pupils' prior learning. However, these plans are not yet formulated fully.

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 school to be good on 14 January

2016.

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	115071
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10087424
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	77
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Helen Kent-Jackson
Headteacher	Stephanie Newland
Website	www.st-margaretscofe.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 January 2016

Information about this school

- The headteacher has been in post since September 2019.
- An improvement board has been commissioned by the local authority to support and challenge school leaders.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team met with the headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and two members of the local governing body, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors met with teachers from all year groups and several groups of pupils to talk about their learning across the curriculum.
- Inspectors considered reading, writing, mathematics and history as part of the inspection. They spoke to leaders of these subjects, visited lessons, spoke with pupils and looked at pupils' work to understand the quality of education.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher as the designated safeguarding leader, held meetings with pupils and spoke to staff and the governing body to check the effectiveness of safeguarding. Inspectors also checked the school's processes for checking suitability of adults who work with pupils and who visit the school.

- Inspectors considered 13 parent responses to Ofsted's online and free-text survey, Parent View, 11 responses to the staff survey and 10 responses to the pupil survey. An inspector also spoke with parents on the playground at the beginning of the day.

Inspection team

Cindy Impey, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lesley Daniel

Ofsted Inspector

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