

Inspection of St Mary's Infants' School

St Mary's Way, Baldock, Hertfordshire SG7 6HY

Inspection dates:

5–6 November 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at St Mary's Infants enjoy coming to school. They told inspectors that teachers help them to do their best.

Pupils say that they feel happy and safe at school and their parents agree. One parent summed up the views of others in their praise for the changes that the new headteacher has made. Parents welcome the higher expectations for what children can do.

Pupils say that bullying rarely happens. They know that teachers will deal quickly with any incidents if they do occur. Pupils elected to the school council enjoy their responsibilities in reporting to the headteacher and chair of governors.

Staff are working hard to make sure that pupils receive a full and rich curriculum. The impact of staff's work is evident in the teaching of mathematics and science. However, this is not yet the case in Reception, where the curriculum is still developing.

Pupils demonstrate the values of the school through their behaviour. They show respect towards each other, towards their teachers and towards other adults. Leaders have made sure that pupils learn about British values and the wider world in which pupils live. Pupils are suitably prepared for the next stage of their education.

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

The new headteacher is ambitious for all groups of pupils to do well, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). She has a clear understanding of what pupils should know and the order in which they should learn new knowledge and skills. The headteacher has identified that some leaders are not as effective as others in improving the curriculum.

The teaching of reading begins when pupils start in Reception classes. Pupils told inspectors that they love reading. Leaders have taken action to make sure that the teaching of reading is improving. Teachers ask useful questions to check pupils' understanding. This helps to make sure that pupils can apply their reading skills successfully in other areas of their learning. However, some adults would welcome additional training to improve their subject knowledge in phonics and how to teach it.

Some children in the Reception class do not concentrate on activities for long. This is because they do not always understand the instructions that teachers give them. Sometimes, tasks are too hard for children to complete well. This happens where teachers have not checked that children have remembered the knowledge that they need, or have the skills required to be successful.

Inspectors saw that some teachers do not make sure that pupils take enough care with their handwriting and the presentation of their work. The headteacher has introduced a new process to teach handwriting.

Pupils are encouraged to write for different purposes across the school. But, in subjects beyond English, teachers do not encourage pupils to apply their knowledge of spelling, punctuation and grammar appropriately. This means that some pupils do not achieve as well in writing as they should.

Some pupils do not achieve well in national tests in reading, writing and mathematics. This includes pupils with SEND and disadvantaged pupils. Higher ability pupils do not perform as well as their peers nationally in writing and mathematics. There are some groups of pupils who still require further support to reach the same level as their peers.

Pupils with SEND are encouraged to be fully involved in school life. Teachers work hard to ensure that pupils with SEND access the full curriculum. Teachers help pupils to develop their vocabulary so that they can read, and use, more complex language.

Pupils take part in a range of clubs at lunchtime and after school. After school, pupils enjoy sports and cooking clubs. The school has strong links with the community and with the local church.

Pupils' attendance remains high. Leaders are working closely with families to improve the attendance of a small number of pupils who do not attend school as often as they should.

Governors and the local authority provide effective support and challenge for the headteacher. Appropriate training for governors makes sure that they are up to date with national changes in education. They are very aware of the school's strengths and of the areas that need to improve. Governors and other leaders make sure that they consider the workload of staff when making any improvements needed.

Staff are supportive of the new headteacher and understand the reasons for the changes that she has put in place across the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are very caring about pupils and keep them safe. Adults are aware of when and how to raise concerns about a pupil's welfare. Leaders make sure that all staff receive regular safeguarding training. Leaders record any concerns about a pupil's well-being and work with other organisations appropriately.

Governors conduct regular safeguarding reviews to make sure that pupils are safe.

The school's records of the checks they make on adults working in the school meet requirements.

Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe in school. All parents responding to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree that their children are safe at school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' ambition to establish a well-structured curriculum is not yet in place in all subject areas. The sequencing of learning, particularly in Reception, does not build effectively on prior knowledge, and pupils do not progress as well as they should. Leaders should embed the planned revisions to the curriculum across all subject areas and year groups.
- Some curriculum leaders do not have the knowledge and skills that they need to make rapid improvements in their area of responsibility. The headteacher has already worked closely with these leaders to develop their leadership skills. This work now needs to be embedded to make sure that the curriculum is implemented effectively.
- Leaders should ensure that teachers and adults working in Reception classes have the appropriate training to improve phonics provision. Some staff do not have the skills they need to help pupils to apply their phonics knowledge confidently to their reading and writing by the start of Year 1. Work with the local authority has already started to improve the quality of education in Reception.

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're 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	117384
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10110231
Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	169
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair of governing body	Andrew Watkin
Headteacher	Verity Edey
Website	www.stmarysinfants.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 th -25 th May 2018

Information about this school

- The new headteacher joined the school in September 2019.
- The school is a smaller-than-average primary school of 179 pupils aged between four and seven.
- The school has a lower-than-average percentage of disadvantaged pupils.
- The school has a lower-than-average percentage of pupils with SEND.
- The school has a much lower-than-average percentage of pupils for whom English is not their first language.
- The school has a one-year foundation stage with two classes.
- The school has a breakfast club.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- During this inspection, inspectors met with the headteacher, the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, a local authority representative, the deputy headteacher and curriculum leaders.

- The subjects of reading, mathematics, science and computing were considered in depth as part of this inspection. The inspection team met with the leaders of these subjects, visited lessons, spoke with pupils and teachers, and looked at pupils' work in books to view the quality of education.
- The inspection team also met with the designated safeguarding lead, pupils, midday assistants and staff to check safeguarding arrangements. Inspectors also checked the school's processes for checking the suitability of adults who work with pupils, and who volunteer to read with pupils and visit the school.

Inspection team

Rowena Simmons, lead inspector Ofsted Inspector

Debbie Rogan Ofsted Inspector

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