

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Ardleigh

Colchester Road, Ardleigh, Colchester, Essex CO7 7NS

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 October 2022

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

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at St Mary's understand the school's values. They enjoy coming to school. Pupils say, 'The school is special. We treat everyone fairly. Everyone is welcome and teachers respect us and treat us well.' Parents are positive about the school. They know about the changes made by the new leadership.

Pupils behave well during lessons and around the school. They are respectful to each other and courteous to visitors. Pupils feel safe at school. They say that there is no bullying at the school. Pupils know that there is an adult to help them if they are worried. Pupils enjoy the responsibilities they are given. For example, older pupils look out for younger pupils by being their buddies.

Pupils work hard to achieve the high expectations staff have of them. However, pupils do not achieve as well as they should. In some subjects, the curriculum is not as well planned as it should be. As a result, there are gaps in pupils' learning which have not been identified.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of interesting visits and visitors to their school. These experiences help them to learn more of the intended curriculum. Pupils develop stamina for learning and a sense of achievement by their participation in the activities, for example sporting events.

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

Leaders have begun work to improve the school. This work has only started recently so has not had the impact leaders want. Leaders want to construct a high-quality curriculum that builds pupils' knowledge and skills over time. However, this is not in place for all subjects. As a result, pupils do not have enough opportunities to build on their learning, and their achievement is too variable across subjects.

Teachers routinely check on what pupils have learned across the curriculum. However, they do not always use the information from these checks carefully and consistently enough to adapt their teaching and inform their planning. Teachers then move on to new learning before pupils are secure with their understanding. This means there are gaps in pupils' learning and misconceptions that have not been identified. This slows pupils' progress.

Leaders' checking of how well the curriculum is taught is underdeveloped in some subjects. Therefore, leaders do not know if the way teachers implement the curriculum helps pupils achieve as well as they could.

Pupils with special needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access the full curriculum and take part fully in lessons. However, leaders have not accurately identified the needs

of some pupils with SEND, so teachers do not adapt the curriculum appropriately. This means these pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Leaders recognise the importance of effective phonics teaching in helping pupils to read well. The recently introduced phonics scheme allows for consistent planning and well-sequenced teaching. Children in Reception begin to learn sounds very soon after they start school. Children have a secure understanding of the sounds that they have learned. They use this knowledge well as they progress through to key stage 1 and key stage 2. This helps most pupils to read fluently.

In the early years, children have opportunities to explore and play. Staff have a secure understanding of children's needs. Teachers identify clearly what knowledge they want children to learn. This means that children learn quickly how to blend sounds into words. Children experience a sense of community through their learning. They learn about the role of policemen, firemen and doctors, for example. Children speak confidently about what they know about the work these people do. Adults build effective relationships with children. They are skilled at supporting children's language development.

There is a well-planned curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. This supports pupils' learning about the wider world. Leaders have linked the curriculum to the school's ethos and values. Pupils learn that it is important to treat everyone equally. They understand what to do to stay healthy, both physically and mentally.

Pupils are polite, kind and caring. They play happily together during playtimes and take turns when playing. They include others in their games. Pupils listen to teachers' instructions. Occasionally, teachers need to remind pupils to listen carefully when adults are speaking during lessons, but learning is rarely disrupted.

Leaders have worked with the local authority to improve the school. Leaders know that there is more to do. They have clear plans in place for the development of the curriculum and staff. Governors know most of the school's strengths and what needs to be better. However, they do not hold leaders rigorously to account for the quality of education provided.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a well-established culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff are trained effectively in the school's safeguarding processes and procedures. They know how to identify pupils who might be at risk of harm. Staff report concerns quickly. Leaders involve external partners to help pupils.

Leaders carry out checks on adults who work at the school. The school ensures safe recruitment of all staff.

Pupils feel safe and understand that there is an adult they can talk to about playground issues. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Curriculum leaders' planning in some subjects requires greater precision. Their plans do not clearly identify the important knowledge that pupils should learn or organise this in a logical way that helps teachers plan effective sequences of learning. In these subjects, pupils do not build effectively on what they have learned previously. Leaders should ensure that curriculum leaders have the time and expertise to ensure that all curriculum plans are designed, sequenced and delivered effectively.
- Teachers do not use their checks on pupils' learning effectively in all subjects. Leaders have not identified the needs of some pupils with SEND accurately. This means teachers do not identify misconceptions and gaps in pupils' learning or adapt their teaching to help all pupils learn well. Leaders must ensure that all teachers adapt their teaching appropriately, based on pupils' needs and previous learning, so that pupils achieve well across the curriculum.
- Governors robustly scrutinise safeguarding and the school's finances. However, they are not as rigorous in checking the quality of education. Governors must ensure they hold leaders to account to help secure improvements in the quality of education provided.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

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	115084
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10241324
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	111
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Dan Scatola and Amanda Watts
Headteacher	Nathan Kempster
Website	www.ardleighstmarys.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Mary's is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- There have been very recent changes to governance, including new co-chairs of the governing body.
- The acting headteacher has been in post since January 2022.
- Reception children are taught separately. There are three mixed-age classes comprising of Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4 and Years 5 and 6.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.
- The school's most recent inspection of its religious character under section 48 of the Education Act was in 2017. The school will receive its next section 48 inspection within eight years of that date.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, history and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited sample lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors considered the curriculum in other areas, for example in PSHE education.
- The inspectors spoke to a range of senior leaders including the acting headteacher and special educational needs coordinator. Inspectors met with members of the governing body and spoke to a local authority representative who works with the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors looked at documents and records and spoke to leaders, teachers, governors and pupils about safeguarding.
- The inspectors listened to a range of pupils read from different year groups.
- Inspectors met with pupils to talk about their experiences of school. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at playtime. The inspectors also considered 45 responses to the pupil questionnaire.
- The inspectors considered the 20 responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, including 20 free-text responses from parents.
- There were 12 responses to the staff survey. Inspectors also spoke to staff throughout the inspection to gather their views.

Inspection team

Bozena Laraway, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Nick Rudman

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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