

Inspection of Dover, St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Laureston Place, Dover, Kent, CT16 1QX

Inspection dates: 15 and 16 November 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

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy a calm and nurturing school atmosphere where they feel happy and cared for. The school's values of 'peace, friendship, respect, trust and perseverance' are thoughtfully taught through collective worship, in lessons, and in pupils' daily interactions with each other. As a result, these values are understood and consistently modelled by all members of the community. The relationships between pupils and staff are supportive and pupils know that staff will help them if they are worried about anything.

Leaders have high expectations for pupils' behaviour, and bullying is not tolerated. Pupils know what they need to do if they have concerns about bullying or unkindness. This understanding helps them to feel safe and secure at school.

Pupils are unwaveringly polite and take pride in the leadership responsibilities that they are provided with in school, including librarian and house captain. Pupils happily describe their school as 'open to everyone'. Parents share these positive views too. As one parent stated, 'The teaching and support staff are helpful and committed to the pupils' well-being and education.'

Leaders have ensured recent improvements in mathematics, but there is more work to do to strengthen the teaching of reading.

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

Leaders know their pupils well and are very aware of the barriers that some pupils in the school community face.

There is a reading programme in place to support pupils to read when they join in Reception. Children enjoy being read to and are excited to learn new sounds. However, leaders have not yet ensured that staff training is having the impact they desire. As a result, not all pupils get off to the best possible start in their reading and are not receiving the support they need to read confidently. The books that some pupils read in school and take home are not always closely focused on supporting them to become more confident and fluent readers. This means that some pupils are missing valuable opportunities to practise the sounds that they know and receive feedback to improve. However, in mathematics staff have strong subject knowledge and leaders have thought carefully about how and when to teach mathematical knowledge.

Children in Reception start to learn basic numeracy as soon as they begin school. The learning opportunities that children have to practise their mathematics in Reception are closely matched to what they know and what they need to do to improve. Beyond mathematics, some activities need to be more consistently focused on the knowledge children need to encounter, in order to enhance their learning of the world around them.

In the curriculum beyond reading and mathematics, leaders have taken some positive actions to make improvements. In design technology, for example, leaders have thought carefully about the content to teach and the end points that they want pupils to achieve. Leaders have also put in place an effective curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE). Pupils value these lessons and opportunities to learn about being healthy and staying safe.

Adaptations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and pupils who speak English as an additional language are varied. Pupils are fully included in lessons and teachers adapt activities for them. Where the curriculum is designed well, the adaptations are considered and effective. Leaders are working to ensure that all pupils receive the right help in a timely way to access the curriculum and achieve well in school. This includes additional training and support for all staff to cater for the needs of all pupils.

Beyond the academic curriculum, pupils benefit from a range of community-linked activities. Leaders are determined to provide a wide experience for all pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged.

Leaders have established clear expectations for pupils' behaviour and conduct. The school's policy for managing pupils' behaviour is implemented consistently well. Staff are clear with their expectations and pupils respond positively to them. Beginning in Reception, children learn to take turns and listen carefully to each other. As a result, lessons are calm and pupils are keen to work hard.

Governors are fully committed to the development of the school. They have a range of skills and are keen to use their expertise. They have supported leaders with seeking additional capacity at a senior leadership level to drive some of the improvements necessary, including improving attendance. However, they are not yet holding leaders to account and checking in sufficient depth what leaders have told them about the school. As a result, governors do not yet have a fully accurate view of the areas that the school must urgently prioritise.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are alert to any signs of concern, and they report these in a timely manner. Leaders work alongside external agencies to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Through the curriculum, pupils learn important knowledge about, for example, internet safety. They also know that they have trusted adults in school who they can speak to if they have any worries. However, there are some minor weaknesses in the recording of actions after incidents of a safeguarding nature have occurred. Leaders recognise that they need to ensure that all actions are carefully and accurately recorded.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's programme to teach pupils to read is not yet having the impact it needs. Support for weaker readers is not strong enough. Leaders must ensure that all pupils learning to read have access to phonically decodable books in school and to share at home that are closely matched to the sounds they know and are learning. Leaders also must ensure that all staff are sufficiently trained to help pupils to read.
- Children in Reception are not yet receiving purposeful opportunities to practise and broaden their knowledge across all areas of learning. There is stronger practice in mathematics, where children are well supported to access activities that are well linked to the content they are learning about. However, this is not consistently the case across all areas of learning. Leaders must ensure that there are deliberate and appropriate decisions made about the activities available and further bespoke support to make informed choices for those children who need it.
- Leaders are taking actions to improve attendance. Not all actions have been timely and many are not yet having the desired impacts. Leaders need to review the approaches they are using so that pupils are in school more consistently and benefiting from a full-time education.
- Governors are not yet providing suitable challenge to assure themselves of the strengths and areas of development of the school. This means that they rely too much on leaders' assertions when they are evaluating the school. They must ensure that they review and improve the approaches they use to assure themselves that leaders' actions are appropriate and proportionate.
- Some safeguarding records are not sufficiently detailed. This means that it is not always clear what actions have been taken to address and monitor some incidents. Leaders should have rigorous checks in place to ensure that all resulting actions are accurately recorded.

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	118748
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10227155
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	159
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Elizabeth Fisher
Headteacher	Helen Comfort (Executive Headteacher) Matthew Lamprell (Head of School)
Website	www.st-marys-dover.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There have been changes in the senior leadership of the school since the last inspection. In 2017, the executive headteacher was appointed as part of a memorandum with the local authority and a head of school joined in September 2021. Since September 2022, an assistant head of school and a part-time special educational needs and disabilities coordinator have joined.
- The most recent section 48 inspection took place in October 2022, where the school was graded as good.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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 reviewed a range of documentation and relevant school policies, including the school development plan.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, design technology and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at curriculum planning documents in physical education and PSHE.
- As part of inspecting early years, inspectors met with the Reception class teacher and made visits to the Reception class.
- Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body, a local authority adviser and representatives from the Canterbury Diocese.
- Inspectors reviewed the arrangements for safeguarding by scrutinising relevant documentation, including staff recruitment checks. Case files were also sampled to explore how the school identifies and supports pupils at risk of harm. Inspectors also talked to a range of staff and pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with staff, pupils and parents to gather their views. They considered 17 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including nine free-text comments. Inspectors also took account of 24 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Hanna Miller, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Zoe Enser

His Majesty's Inspector

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