

# Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Academy

Trinity Avenue, Mildenhall, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP28 7LR

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Inspection dates: 22 and 23 May 2024

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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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

This school is a single academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Julian Campbell.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

At St Mary's, pupils are happy. At lunchtimes, they enjoy activities such as dancing, collecting snails and playing sports together. They chat and interact in a friendly way. Pupils are confident that staff will listen to them and help them sort things out. This helps keep pupils safe.

Pupils are now very clear about how to behave. They know and follow the new school rules. Those pupils who need it get lots of extra support to manage their emotions. This includes being able to spend time in 'The Nest', where they can undertake calming activities such as Lego.

Pupils have experienced recent improvements in what they learn. They now study a full range of subjects. They benefit from a clear approach to learning to read. However, all of this is relatively new. Many pupils have not built up strong and secure subject knowledge or learned to read well enough.

There are many opportunities for pupils to pursue their interests. Pupils who are part of the eco-council have raised lots of money for charity by recycling. They have worked to make the school environmentally friendly and have learned all about how to be responsible global citizens.

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

The school has not ensured that all pupils achieve as well as they should. Outcomes in the 2023 national tests and assessments were low. This is because the school had not ensured that a suitable curriculum was in place or that it was taught well enough. Consequently, pupils developed gaps in what they should have known. Governors did not have an accurate enough picture of the quality of education at the school to be able to challenge this robustly enough or to ensure prompt action was taken to address it.

The school has made significant changes in leadership. New school leaders have set about addressing these issues effectively. They have ensured that a suitable curriculum is now in place. They have started training subject leaders so that they can support teachers in each subject effectively. This is successfully impacting on improving teachers' subject knowledge. Although teaching is improving, there are still too many teachers who do not check carefully enough what pupils know, and adapt what they teach to take account of this. This means that while pupils build important knowledge, they do not do so consistently well.

The school has trained staff in a new approach to teaching reading. Although this is helping to improve how well pupils can read, it is not fully established. Too many pupils make mistakes in reading and spelling unfamiliar words, because some staff do not help them to learn and remember the phonics knowledge needed to do so. This includes children in early years. This means that some pupils' reading lacks fluency. However, the school has worked to grow a love of reading through

dedicated reading time. Consequently, more pupils are developing positive attitudes towards reading.

Children in the early years follow a curriculum that covers all areas of learning. For example, they learn about expressive arts and mathematics by learning about doubles, and then painting butterflies linked to this. However, teachers do not always provide activities that reinforce learning important knowledge so that children remember it. For example, children had learned about parts of a butterfly but were unsure how to identify these, because planned activities did not reinforce this well enough.

The school has enabled pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities to access the curriculum. This is because staff are aware of pupils' needs and cater for them by adapting learning effectively. Consequently, they learn more successfully than many of their peers.

The school has made significant improvements to pupils' behaviour recently. Pupils now follow the school rules. The school has put in place lots of additional support, such as counselling, emotional literacy and therapy. This helps pupils to be able to manage their emotions and behave well.

The school promotes pupils' personal development well, through opportunities such as the 'faith council'. The 'secret detective society' celebrates and shares community and charity work. Pupils excitedly add 'cubes to the tube' when they have demonstrated the school's values. This helps them learn about democracy. Pupils recently agreed on a school reward of playground scooters. A range of clubs and competitive sporting opportunities further support pupils' social development.

Leaders and those responsible for governance have recognised that the school needed to improve. They have put in place clear plans to address this, while at the same time being considerate of staff's workload and well-being. These plans are showing early signs of impact. Trustees recognise that continuing to improve processes for challenge and support are paramount. This includes following through with plans to ensure school leaders have the capacity they need for continued improvement.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not ensured that all pupils can read fluently enough. As a result, younger pupils in particular make too many mistakes with decoding and blending words. This is because they have not secured their knowledge of how to use phonics well enough. The school needs to ensure that it provides further guidance and support for staff to teach the phonics programme effectively, so that pupils can decode and blend with confidence and read with age-appropriate levels of fluency.
- In some subjects, teachers do not routinely check what pupils know and then use this information to plan learning that builds on pupils' prior knowledge effectively. As a result, particularly in the foundation subjects, pupils do not secure or retain important knowledge as well as they should. The school needs to ensure that teachers carefully check what pupils know and then use this information to plan and adapt learning to build pupils' subject knowledge effectively.
- Trustees have not challenged with enough rigour and precision to have full awareness of the extent of the issues the school faced. As a result, the quality of education at the school has declined, because trustees have not dealt quickly and effectively enough with issues where they have existed. Trustees need to ensure they use a range of information so that they have a clear and accurate picture of the quality of education at the school and can use this to challenge and support school leaders to bring about necessary improvements.

## 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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137419
<b>Local authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	10323707
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	403
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Julian Campbell
<b>Principal</b>	Roxanne Rutter
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.smpsac.org">www.smpsac.org</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	8 and 9 March 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The principal took up post in September 2023.
- The school has a religious character, which is the Church of England.
- The school had an inspection of its religious character, under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, in March 2020. The next section 48 inspection will be within five years.

## Information about this inspection

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

- The inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- To discuss governance, an inspector met with the chair of trustees, the local authority standards and excellence officer and a representative sample of trustees.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the designated safeguarding leads and the behaviour and personal development leads.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, science, languages and design and technology. For each deep dive, the inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spent time in early years and spoke with children and staff there. They also considered the curriculum in some other subjects, including personal, social, health and economic education and relationships and sex education.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around school and at social times.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and Ofsted's staff survey. They considered responses to the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text messages.

### **Inspection team**

James Chester, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Carol Dallas	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Fowler	Ofsted Inspector

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