

Inspection of St Mark's CofE Primary School

Wood Terrace, Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST1 4LR

Inspection dates:	15 and 16 October 2024
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	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Deborah Sadler. This school is part of the Orchard Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Sean Thomson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gillian Howell.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school that is full of smiles. Staff want pupils to achieve their best. Pupils thrive personally and socially. However, despite recent improvements, pupils do not learn as well as they should across the curriculum and in national assessments.

The school is rooted in its community. It serves an extremely diverse area. Many families speak English as an additional language. A significant number of families have recently arrived in the country and are new to speaking English. Many pupils move in and out of the school over time and this has an impact on their learning. Staff are deeply committed to ensuring that pupils and families settle into school life. Pupils said that 'everyone is welcome here'.

Pupils behave well in and around school. Relationships are strong and pupils get along with each other well. There is little or no disruption in lessons. Pupils are keen to learn and spoke positively about behaviour across school.

Pupils have a deep understanding of the school's values. Responsibility, equality, spirituality, perseverance, enthusiasm, commitment and trust are central to all that the school does. Pupils explain how these values impact on their actions in and out of school. They understand how they help to make them good citizens.

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

The school has been through a period of turbulence. New leaders at school and in the trust have worked rapidly to improve all aspects of the school's work. This is starting to have an impact. Aspirations for pupils' education are far higher than they were. However, the improvements made are only just starting to have an impact on pupils' learning.

The school's curriculum has been refined. It is now more logically thought out and is organised to enable pupils to build on what they have previously learned. However, staff are not skilled enough in delivering the curriculum as the school intends. As a result, pupils are not learning the curriculum as well as they should.

Teachers use assessment well in some curriculum areas, such as in phonics. However, in many subjects, teachers do not check as well as they should on pupils' learning both in lessons and over time. This means that often gaps in learning are not addressed or that pupils' learning is not moved on quickly enough when they have learned what has been delivered.

Subject leaders are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects. They know how they should be taught well. They have started to make checks to ensure that this is the case. However, these checks are at an early stage of development and subject leaders do not have an accurate overview of how well their subject is delivered and how this can be improved.

Children make a good start in early years. There is a focus on children learning important language and vocabulary. Staff make sure that children are taught specific knowledge and skills, which they then practise in their play. However, in some areas of learning, children's learning is not as clearly ordered as in others. As a result, the school cannot always be sure that the early years curriculum provides a firm foundation for children to build on in later years.

There has been far more progress in the delivery of the school's phonics scheme. The scheme is now delivered as intended. Across the school, all pupils who need to learn or consolidate their phonics knowledge receive the help that they need. The books that pupils read are closely matched to the sounds they need to practise. This is enabling pupils to become more fluent readers. Pupils enjoy and remember the books that are read to them in class.

There is a greatly improving picture in relation to pupils' attendance. Overall attendance is now within national expectations. This is because there are more rigorous systems in place with regard to managing attendance. The school works closely with families and other agencies to improve the attendance of pupils who are not attending school as well as they should.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn alongside their peers. Their needs are identified early and they get extra support when they need it.

Pupils' personal development is a strength of the school. They quickly learn about life in modern Britain. Pupils talk about how diversity is part of their school and how they ensure new arrivals are cared for. Pupils experience a range of trips and visits which broaden their horizons. They are given opportunities to lead, such as prefects and school council. They are proud of these roles.

Staff are very positive about all aspects of the school's work, including their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some staff are not as adept as they should be in delivering the curriculum. This impacts on pupils' learning. The school should provide support and training to enable staff to deliver the curriculum well and pupils to learn well.
- Staff do not check how well pupils are learning in lessons and over time. This means that pupils' learning is slowed and gaps in learning are not addressed. The school should make sure that teachers assess how well pupils are learning.

- The evaluation and monitoring of some subjects is not as effective as it should be. Subject leaders do not have an effective overview of how well pupils are achieving or where there are gaps in teachers' and pupils' subject knowledge. The school should support subject leaders to fulfil their roles so they can fully monitor and bring about improvements in the quality of education in their subject.
- In some subjects, what children should learn in the early years has not been fully considered. As a result, there is a lack of clarity about how pupils build on their previous learning as they move into key stage 1. The school should ensure that all subject curriculum thinking fully considers what children should learn in the early years.

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

Unique reference number	146465
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10344155
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	453
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gillian Howell
CEO of the trust	Sean Thomson
Headteacher	Deborah Sadler
Website	www.stmarksprimary.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school operates a breakfast club before school.
- The school is part of the Orchard Academy Trust, which consists of seven schools.
- The school is within the Diocese of Lichfield. Its latest section 48 inspection was in April 2024. The school's next section 48 inspection will take place within five years of the previous inspection.
- A new headteacher has very recently taken up post at school.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form

provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, the lead inspector held meetings with the headteacher. He met five members of the local governing board, including the co-chairs of the board. He met three trustees, including the chair of the trust. He also met the CEO. He held a telephone conversation with a representative of the diocese.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, English, history and music. They met with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and viewed examples of pupils' work. An inspector also spoke to subject leaders in science, geography, and design and technology.
- An inspector observed pupils in key stages 1 and 2 read to a trusted adult.
- The inspectors spoke with members of staff about their workload and well-being.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school.
- The inspectors considered the responses, including the free-text comments, to Ofsted Parent View. They also considered the responses to the staff survey. Inspectors spoke to parents and carers at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's improvement priorities, school policies, curriculum documents, SEND records, behaviour records, attendance records and minutes of meetings held by the trust board.

Inspection team

Barry Yardsley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ellen Taylor

Ofsted Inspector

Su Plant

Ofsted Inspector

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