

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

Church Road, Thornbury, Bristol BS35 1HJ

Inspection dates:	29 and 30 April 2025
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	Outstanding

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding for overall effectiveness at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since February 2014. Since September 2024, schools have not been awarded an overall effectiveness grade.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and safe. They form warm, positive relationships with staff and each other. Older pupils are pleased to be 'buddies' for the younger children. This develops their sense of care and responsibility. The school encourages pupils to show gratitude through gestures of kindness, such as writing thank-you letters.

The school has recently raised its expectations for pupils' achievement. It has started to strengthen the curriculum and be more ambitious for its pupils. However, some pupils are not prepared well enough for the next stage of their education. Some children in Reception Year do not get off to the strong start that they need.

Pupils behave well. There is rarely any disruption in lessons, and pupils usually have positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils know and follow new routines well. As a result, the school is calm and orderly.

Parents and carers appreciate the school's distinctive ethos. Pupils are keen to live up to the school's values, such as justice, peace and hope. They have opportunities to contribute to both the local and global communities. This helps them to learn how they can make a positive difference to others. For example, they sing at a local home for elderly residents and raise donations for a school in Africa.

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

Governors and leaders know that the school needs to strengthen the quality of education for pupils. However, until recently, governors have not been tenacious in seeking assurances about the school's effectiveness. The school has started to make the necessary improvements. Governors are now holding leaders to account. However, much of this work is in its infancy.

The school has ensured that pupils follow a broad curriculum. In most subjects, it has designed, in a logical order, what pupils should learn over time. However, it has not identified precisely enough the most important knowledge and skills in some subjects. In particular, the school does not have a sharp focus on the vocabulary that children should learn in Reception Year. This is hindering the range of words that children learn and use.

Most pupils become competent readers. However, some pupils lack fluency and confidence when reading. This is because the early reading plan is not implemented effectively. Consequently, some pupils fall behind and do not get the support they need to catch up.

The school has started to strengthen teachers' subject knowledge and expertise. For example, in mathematics, teachers show pupils clearly how to complete calculations before they try for themselves. However, the school does not routinely check pupils' understanding of the most important knowledge across subjects. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their learning and develop misconceptions. This is particularly the case in writing, which is reflected in the most recent published outcomes for the school.

In Reception Year, the curriculum does not build on children's starting points. This means that the youngest children do not deepen their knowledge and understanding as well as they should.

The school has strengthened how it identifies and supports pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). In most subjects, the curriculum is adapted well to ensure that pupils' individual needs are met. However, this is not consistent. Some pupils with SEND do achieve as well as they should.

Pupils have good attendance and are punctual. The school closely checks any patterns of absence. It provides effective support to help raise pupils' attendance when necessary. Pupils live up to the school's recently renewed expectations for their behaviour and conduct. Nevertheless, they occasionally lack motivation because work or activities are not matched well to their starting points. This impacts on their enthusiasm for learning and how well some pupils sustain their concentration.

The school has designed an effective personal, social and health education programme. Pupils gain an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships and how to keep themselves safe online. The school keeps this programme under review and makes adaptations to meet pupils' needs. It supports groups of pupils well to develop their social skills.

Pupils benefit from opportunities to promote their wider development. For instance, they vote for members of the 'junior leadership team', which helps them to learn about democracy. The school develops pupils' understanding of diversity. It invites them to dress up as superheroes to share their unique skills and attributes. Science and creative arts fairs showcase careers ranging from engineering to musical theatre. Pupils benefit from these opportunities to learn about different jobs.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum does not develop children's learning well enough in Reception Year. As a result, some children do not deepen or secure their knowledge and understanding. The school must ensure that the curriculum in Reception Year builds on children's knowledge in all areas so that it prepares them well for key stage 1.
- The school does not use assessment effectively to identify gaps and misconceptions in pupils' learning. Therefore, it does not adapt the curriculum well to build on pupils' knowledge and understanding. The school must strengthen the checks it makes on pupils' learning so that it can adapt teaching to build on from pupils' starting points and deepen their knowledge and understanding.

- Governors have not gained sufficient insight into the school's effectiveness. As a result, they have not provided enough challenge and support to bring about necessary improvements. The school must ensure that governors have a strong oversight of all aspects of its work, so that they can hold the school to account effectively.

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	109263
Local authority	South Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10344448
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	199
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Chris Eastwood
Headteacher	Samantha Gillman
Website	www.stmarysthornbury.com
Dates of previous inspection	4 and 5 February 2014

Information about this school

- The school is a Church of England voluntary-aided school in the Diocese of Gloucester. It received its most recent section 48 inspection in March 2025.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

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.

- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator. The headteacher was not present during the inspection. An inspector held discussions with a group of governors and representatives from the local authority and the diocese.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work. An inspector listened to a sample of pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site.
- Inspectors analysed school documentation, including leaders' evaluations and plans for improvement. Inspectors scrutinised a range of policies and procedures, including those that relate to the curriculum, SEND, safeguarding and behaviour.
- 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 Parent View and parents' free-text comments. An inspector met with some parents at the beginning and end of the school day.
- Inspectors spoke with staff to gather their views about the school and evaluated their responses to Ofsted's staff survey

Inspection team

James Oldham, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Wendy Hanrahan

Ofsted Inspector

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