

St Mary's CofE VA Primary School

Wintringham Road, , St Neots, PE19 1NX

Inspection dates

12–13 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Despite good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, pupils' progress in Key Stage 2 slows and standards by the time they leave are below average in both English and mathematics.
- Although there are some examples of good teaching, there is generally not enough good and better teaching to bring about rapid improvements in standards.
- Marking is not used well enough to inform pupils clearly about what they need to do to improve. Where teachers' comments do require further work by pupils, they are not sufficiently followed up by teachers.
- Not all teachers check that pupils are actually broadening and deepening their learning as the lessons proceed.
- In too many lessons, pupils do not understand why they are doing something, and this means that their grasp of key concepts is not secure.
- The school's leaders and managers have not yet eradicated weaknesses in teaching or had sufficient impact on learning and progress in lessons. They do not use their information about the performance of different groups of pupils sufficiently forcefully to ensure the raising of standards at the end of key Stage 2.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and governors are ambitious for the school and have good plans to eliminate any remaining weaknesses in teaching and achievement.
- Progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is good, particularly in pupils' early reading skills.
- Pupils' behaviour is good. They enjoy school and feel safe in school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed fifteen lessons or part lessons, two of which were joint observations with the head teacher. They also scrutinised the work of the pupils, and listened to a number of pupils read.
- Meetings were held with pupils, staff, the Chair, and a second member of the Governing Body. A meeting also took place with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents including the school improvement plan, monitoring files, minutes of governors' meetings, data on pupils' past and current progress and records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.
- The inspectors took account of the 12 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). They also considered a recent school initiated survey of the views of parents and carers. They looked at the 23 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Ronald Cohen, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Gillian Scobie

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding provided for children in local authority care, those from service families and those known to be eligible for free school meals) is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic groups and speak English as an additional language is average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disabled or who have special educational needs and are supported at school action is above the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational need is above the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school has received many awards. These include: Eco Schools Award, Financial Management of Schools, and the E Qualities award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good or better by ensuring that:
 - teachers frequently build opportunities into their planning, and in the lessons themselves, to check that pupils' are making good progress and are extending their learning
 - the marking of pupils' work includes comments which clearly identify what pupils need to do in order to improve their work, and that all teachers check that pupils have understood and acted on this advice.
- Raise standards, particularly by the end of Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics, by ensuring that in both subjects, teachers make clear why pupils are being set particular activities so that they can develop a better understanding of the skills and concepts needed to attain higher standards.
- Improve the leadership and management of teaching by making sure that:
 - subject leaders take a more effective part in checking and advising on the quality and consistency of teaching and learning in their subjects
 - senior leaders and governors maintain a robust overview of data on teaching and learning in the school so they can quickly identify how well groups of pupils in the school are performing and take action to improve it.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Despite good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, pupils' achievement across the school is inconsistent. At the end of key stage 1, standards are broadly average. However, by the end of Key Stage 2, even with some good progress from low starts, standards overall remain below average.
- By the end of Year 6, pupils make better than expected progress in writing. Progress in reading, however, is slower, resulting in below average attainment in English, overall.
- A similar picture exists in mathematics, where some pupils make good progress whilst some older pupils struggle to make the progress expected of them. Pupils often have gaps in their understanding of basic concepts resulting from weaker teaching in the past. Pupils have made progress in basic number skills, but they are often unable to apply these to problem solving.
- Given their low starting points, this means that they are not always making the accelerated progress which is necessary for them to attain good standards.
- Most children start school with skills that are well below those expected for their age, particularly in language and number work. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Key Stage 1 and their attainment when the leave Reception has caught up with the expected standard.
- The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) is a real strength. Teachers expect pupils to do their best and they respond. As a result, they make good progress and attainment by the end of Year 2 is broadly in line with national averages.
- The school has used the extra funding through the pupil premium to provide this group of pupils with additional support. However, the progress they are making is too variable. They make expected progress in reading and writing but not in mathematics, and their attainment remains up to two terms behind other pupils in the school.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress in the lower part of the school. Small group additional intervention lessons are having a significant impact on their learning but have not been able to compensate for teaching in previous years that was weak. These pupils do not, therefore, make more than average progress in Year 6
- All pupils in the school, and particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, make good and sometimes outstanding progress in their personal development and grow in confidence. Pupils from minority ethnic groups make more than expected progress.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The quality of teaching varies considerably. The best teaching provides a strong model for others to learn from. However such good practice is not the norm. Too often teaching requires improvement.
- In the weaker lessons, some teachers do not think carefully enough, when planning, about precisely what pupils need to learn in order to show progress, and when and how to check that this is happening. Too often, when it does occur, such checking is left too late in the lesson.
- Some teachers talk too long, often with pupils sitting passively for long periods on the carpet. This leads to pupils' attention wandering. As a result, their interest wanes and their subsequent progress slows.
- Although teachers regularly plan lessons to cover the key concepts pupils need to master, they do not make clear why pupils are being set a particular activity or explain how this links to the concepts they wish to develop. Consequently, although pupils complete the tasks set, their learning does not move on sufficiently.
- Marking follows the school's policy of 'helpful hints and positive praise'. In practice, the latter is done better than the former. Hints are not always helpful, and do not always show clearly, what the particular problem was or what pupils should do to correct it
- The teaching of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is variable. Although, caring attitudes are always shown by staff, not all pupils in this group make the progress expected of them. However, pupils do particularly well in the smaller 'withdrawal and intervention' lessons.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and contributes significantly to the good start which children make in school, particularly the teaching of phonics. Assessment of children's progress is frequent and informs the planning of new activities. Good relationships between adults and children lead to children being enthusiastic, engaging and communicative, while also developing the confidence to work independently.
- Where teaching is good, pupils take an active part in the lesson, are fully engaged and understand what they are doing and how and why they are using the methods proposed. Other features of good teaching include: the relationships in the classrooms between all adults and children: the good use of resources; and the sensitive and calm way in which behaviour is managed.
- In almost all lessons, pupils work hard and are eager to please, no more so than when being called to the front to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. In the more successful lessons, even when pupils' eagerness to contribute is not matched by their accuracy, teachers make good use of the situation, with, the phrase 'We can all learn from something which is not quite right'.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- Pupils behave well in lessons, around the school and during play time and lunch time. The few pupils who have difficulties managing their behaviour are supported well by the staff, and this has resulted in their better behaviour.
- Attendance is below average but is rising year on year, demonstrating that pupils increasingly enjoy being in school. They feel safe in school because the site is secure and because, as they say, there is very little bullying. If bullying were to occur, pupils know who to go to and are confident that it would be dealt with swiftly and effectively.
- Pupils show a good understanding of how to behave safely and the dangers of crossing the road, talking to strangers and cyber-bullying, for example.
- The school works hard in assemblies and in teaching to ensure pupils understand and respect the lives of other pupils, particularly those from very diverse backgrounds whose lives may be very different to their own. Its caring and supportive approach ensures that these pupils, and others whose circumstances make them vulnerable, feel welcome in the school.
- Pupils readily take on a range of responsibilities. They work as members of the school council and the school Eco group, and many take up the opportunities to attend the wide range of clubs which are open to them.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher and the governing body have a clear vision and ambition for the school's future. They have taken appropriate action to improve its work. The headteacher has demonstrated resilience, determination and vision in making important changes to both staffing and processes.
- As a result, this is an improving school. However, leadership and management require improvement because pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching are not consistently good over time.
- Leaders are improving the way they manage teachers' performance. Teachers are set clear targets and improvement points so that they teach more effectively and have more impact on pupils' achievement.
- Subject leaders are new to their posts, and their lack of experience means that their impact on improving teaching and learning is limited. In managing their performance, the school does not link these or other teachers' effectiveness to their pay and career progression sufficiently. The school has good plans to provide professional development for subject leaders so that they can make a better contribution to the school's improvement programme.
- The school works well with the local authority which provides good support through a range of activities, which range from learning walks, through understanding data, to 'Getting to Good' programmes, all of which are having an impact, particularly in the lower part of the school.
- Senior leaders and governors monitor the use of pupil premium funding to ensure it is used directly to support this group of pupils but they are not sufficiently robust in ensuring its impact on pupils' progress.
- The school leadership ensures that there is no discrimination, so all pupils have full access to

all aspects of the good and broad curriculum. This is extended to provide experience of the arts and culture, including residential visits, such as that to Aylmerton Field Centre and other places of interest, such as Kettles Yard Art Gallery.

- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school is particularly strong at giving pupils opportunities to reflect on both their own faith and that of others, thereby increasing their knowledge, understanding and respect for other faiths and cultures.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body carries out its statutory duties meticulously. As a result, they ensure that safeguarding requirements are fully met, and that both pupils and staff are safe while at school. They have ensured that performance management systems are in place for all teachers, including the head teacher, and that these challenge weak performance and reward teachers whose performance is good. They know broadly how the school performs but do not have details on how it compares with others or the achievement of specific groups. Governors make regular visits the school, as well as to individual classes and lessons. They are aware of how additional funding, such as the pupil premium, is used and how the impact of this is measured. Governors have been very supportive of leaders in challenging times, but have been equally challenging of the head teacher and senior leaders when new procedures and or staffing changes have been introduced. Governors are determined that the pupils will receive the best education possible, and receive regular updating training from the local authority.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	110848
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	401160

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	172
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ann Williams
Headteacher	Jenny Overs
Date of previous school inspection	16 November 2009
Telephone number	01480 398048
Fax number	01480 398049
Email address	office@stmarys.cambs.sch.uk

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