

St Mary's Church of England School, Balderstone

Oldham Road, Rochdale, Lancashire, OL11 2HB

Inspection dates 9–10 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	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

- Over time, teaching has not been good enough to ensure all pupils consistently make good progress. Progress is weakest in writing across the school and particularly for more-able pupils in Years 5 and 6.
- Pupils do not consistently check and correct their writing and are not given enough opportunities to write at length using a variety of language and structure.
- Expectations for rates of progress that pupils should make are not high enough, particularly in Years 1 and 2, to help pupils move closer to national standards by the end of Year 2.
- Marking requires improvement because it is not consistent enough in quality and frequency, especially in relation to writing.
- Leaders' development plans do not specify how the school can check that its actions are working in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- The leadership of writing is not as effective as that of other subject areas in the school.
- Not enough use is made of outstanding teaching in the school to raise teaching standards higher.
- Governors lack a detailed knowledge and understanding of information on pupils' achievements to be able to check on how well pupils are doing, including those who benefit from the pupil premium.

The school has the following strengths

- The executive headteacher, well supported by leaders, staff and the local authority, has helped to improve the school.
- Pupils' progress is now improving because teaching is improving, with some outstanding teaching. Pupils are now moving closer to the national standards at the end of Year 6, particularly in reading and mathematics.
- Pupils demonstrate high levels of spiritual development.
- The school's breakfast and after-school club helps to promote enjoyment and safety.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. Their attendance is above average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 13 lessons.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read from different year groups.
- Inspectors took account of 10 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and spoke to parents directly.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils. Inspectors also held discussions with the headteacher, four representatives of the governing body, the local authority and school staff.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school's own data on pupils' current progress; documents relating to the school's plans for improvement and its procedures for checking the quality of teaching; records relating to behaviour, attendance and performance management of teachers; and documents relating to safeguarding.
- Pupils' books were checked by inspectors.

Inspection team

Clarice Nelson-Rowe, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Fiona Dixon

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is slightly smaller than the averaged-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- An above-average proportion of pupils are supported by the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and the children of forces families.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action is low.
- The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- Since 2010, the school has been run by an executive headteacher who manages two schools with separate governing bodies.
- The school has seen some staff instability over the last few years.
- The school runs a breakfast and after-school club that is managed by the governing body.
- In 2012, the school did not meet the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching in order to raise achievement, particularly in writing, by:
 - setting higher expectations for rates of progress for all pupils, especially in Years 1 and 2, to bring pupils closer to age-related standards by the end of Year 2
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to write at length using a variety of structure and language, particularly the more-able in Years 5 and 6
 - regularly providing more time for pupils to check and correct their presentation, spellings, grammar and punctuation
 - improving the frequency of marking and consistency in its quality, particularly related to writing across subjects.
- Improve leadership and management in the school by:
 - ensuring that all development plans include a sharp focus on increasing rates of progress and levels of attainment so the school can quickly and accurately evaluate the impact of its actions
 - ensuring all leaders secure improvements well in their subject areas, particularly in writing
 - checking the quality of teaching and learning, particularly marking and the level of challenge for the more-able in writing
 - making more use of outstanding teaching in the school to improve standards of teaching further
 - providing training for governors to extend their understanding of information on pupils' progress, including the difference the pupil premium is making for eligible pupils, to improve their ability to challenge and support the school further.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because the school lacks a consistent record of pupils making good progress over time. While the rate of progress is starting to improve, it is not yet consistently good across all year groups and in all subjects, and is particularly weak in writing. Some of this is because of previous staffing instability.
- Across all year groups, pupils are only at best making the progress expected of them in writing. Pupils of higher ability, particularly in Years 5 and 6, occasionally do not make the progress expected of them. Evidence gathered during the inspection, including examination of pupils' work in Years 4 to 6, shows that there are not enough opportunities for pupils to write at length using a wide range of vocabulary. The presentation of pupils' work is often variable across different subjects. In addition, pupils do not correct their work frequently enough in relation to spellings, grammar and punctuation.
- Pupils now make steady progress through Years 1 and 2. However, they reach below-average levels by the end of Year 2 in reading and writing. This is particularly because of very low starting points but also due to targets that are not set high enough for pupils to make faster rates of progress.
- The proportion of pupils who make the expected progress in reading and mathematics in Years 3 to 6 is variable, but generally improving across the school. As a result, the standards that pupils are now reaching at the end of Year 6 in reading, writing and mathematics, are moving closer to the national averages.
- Pupils across the school make variable progress in mathematics due to a history of inconsistent quality of teaching. However, there are now pockets of good achievement such as observed in Year 3 and Year 6 lessons, where pupils were seen showing good understanding of mathematical terms and tackling problems using a clear order of steps.
- Pupils' ability to read has been improving most of all recently. Readers at the early stages show developing ability in tackling new words due to the careful teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). In the most recent Year 1 phonics test, pupils achieved higher-than-average results overall. In a reading lesson, Year 6 pupils were observed demonstrating good understanding of what they were reading, showing the teacher where the answers to questions about the book could be found.
- Most children enter the school with knowledge and skills that are well below those typically expected for their age. They now progress well through the Reception class, particularly in their personal and language development, thanks to carefully planned activities to improve their skills. The school is also using play activities in the breakfast club well, to help target areas in learning where children need extra support.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, as well as pupils benefiting from the pupil premium, achieve in line with their peers and sometimes better than them, especially in reading, due to extra support in class as well as through small-group work.
- The school is increasing its ability to promote equality in achievement between groups. For example, extra staffing, one-to-one tuition, small-group work and funding for educational visits are becoming increasingly effective in meeting the needs of pupils entitled to the pupil premium funding. As a result, there was no gap between those eligible for the pupil premium and their classmates last year, as measured by average points scored in national tests in English. In mathematics, the two-term gap has yet to close as quickly as in English.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although teaching is improving, it still requires improvement. There is not enough consistency in good teaching over time.
- Expectations have not always been consistently high enough, particularly in writing. Teachers do

not consistently plan enough opportunities to help pupils write at length using a variety of language and structure to help them reach higher levels of writing, particularly for more-able pupils in Years 5 and 6.

- Marking requires improvement. Pupils are not consistently encouraged to respond to teachers' comments in marking by making the suggested corrections to their work to improve presentation and grammar. Sometimes pupils' writing work across a range of subjects is left unmarked for long periods of time. This results in pupils not getting feedback on how to improve their writing skills further and therefore not improving quickly enough.
- Some outstanding teaching was observed and evident in pupils' books. For example, in Year 2 literacy books, pupils check how well they are doing against targets to develop their skills in independently evaluating their work. In these lessons, pupils benefit from lively teaching with good attention to challenge and support for different ability groups, including the more-able. Pupils are encouraged to work in groups to help support one another's learning. For example, in an outstanding Year 6 mathematics lesson, the teacher used questioning well and encouraged pupils to talk together so that they could explain well to the rest of the class, mathematical rules about fractions and division.
- Teaching assistants contribute well to learning. They check pupils' work, identify the areas where they may need more support so future planning by the teacher can take account of this fact and encourage pupils to do their best. As a result, pupils who are supported by teaching assistants often achieve well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils feel safe and enjoy school. This is reflected in their above-average attendance. The majority of parents who spoke to inspectors and responded to the online survey Parent View agree that their children are happy and safe.
- Pupils show good effort in lessons and display high levels of social skills when working with each other. Only occasionally do pupils not complete work or pay proper attention in class.
- Pupils enjoy playtimes with an improved space to play, as a result of the work of the school council in collaboration with the local council. Pupils also enjoy a good range of activities to keep them engaged and 'playground pals', who help younger pupils to play well together and safely.
- Pupils demonstrate high levels of spiritual development. They are deeply reflective and thoughtful. For example, a group of pupils talked to the inspector about a special bench where they enjoy sitting, dedicated in memory of a staff member who had died recently. They fondly shared very happy memories about her.
- Pupils enjoy the support from the learning mentor who helps pupils with reading, managing their emotions and exploring what makes them unique and special. This work is complemented well by the school's breakfast and after-school club which helps pupils to start and end the school day positively.
- Pupils show good understanding of bullying in all its forms and know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. They behave well and records related to pupils' behaviour confirm that this is typically the case.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The executive headteacher and senior leaders, including governors, have been successful in embedding a new vision driven by high expectations that all staff now share. The school is steadily improving and shows the capacity to improve further. However, the rate of improvement has not been rapid enough to raise the school's overall effectiveness to good.
- The local authority has been the key to offering good support for the school through difficult staffing times, by providing access to partnership with another school to improve the quality of

leadership and management and teaching.

- Leaders have been largely successful in improving the quality of teaching, particularly in reading and mathematics, but less so currently in writing. Self-evaluation is largely accurate. However, plans for development lack the necessary detail about how the school measures the impact of its actions in raising levels of achievement and the quality of teaching.
 - Regular checks are carried out on teaching, including the scrutiny of pupils' work. There are some good examples of how teachers' standard of teaching has improved. However, not enough attention is given to the frequency and quality of marking by teachers, especially in writing, and to the level of challenge provided for more-able pupils. Not enough is made of modelling the outstanding teaching that exists in the school.
 - The performance of staff is managed well and closely linked to the government's standards for teachers. Teachers are now better held to account for the progress pupils make. Systems for checking are more precise and pupils who are in danger of falling behind are identified early so that they get the prompt help they need.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors of the school show a fair awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in achievement. However, they do not have enough relevant training or a sufficiently detailed understanding of information on pupils' progress to drive good improvements. Due to visits to the school, they have some knowledge of the quality of teaching and how it is improving, but lack awareness of the difference teaching has been making to pupils' achievement, including pupils supported by the pupil premium. They recognise that their skills are underdeveloped and are eager to undertake further training so they can contribute fully to making recent improvements more secure. Governors ensure that safeguarding requirements are met, the school's finances are stable and make sure that the performance of staff, including any rises in salaries, is managed effectively.
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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	105804
Local authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	412535

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	202
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Patricia Sullivan
Headteacher	Jean O'Neill
Date of previous school inspection	20 November 2008
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