

St Mary's Church of England Academy

Trinity Avaneue, Mildenhall, Bury St Edmunds, IP28 7LR

Inspection dates 10–11 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	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

- Older pupils do not make consistently good progress because teaching has been too varied since the academy opened.
- Achievement varies too much across different subjects. Pupils' progress in writing is not as strong as it is in reading and mathematics.
- Teaching is not always matched to meet the needs of all pupils, particularly the most able. As a result, they do not have the opportunity to take their learning on as far as they are capable.
- Teachers' marking and other guidance do not always show pupils how to improve their work.
- Despite some important improvements since the academy opened, leaders are not improving teaching and achievement as fast as they need to.
- When observing teaching, leaders sometimes fail to focus sufficiently on the impact it is having on achievement and pupils' learning. As a result, their view of the academy's effectiveness lacks accuracy.

The school has the following strengths

- The younger children make a good start at the academy because of highly successful teaching and care in the Early Years' Foundation Stage.
- Pupil achievement in Key Stage 1 and Year 3 has rapidly improved since the academy opened.
- The academy's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a significant strength.
- There are good relationships between adults and children at the academy which support a positive environment in which to enjoy education and friendships. Behaviour is good and pupils say they feel safe.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons of which eight were jointly observed with the headteacher, deputy headteacher or other senior staff. A series of shorter lesson visits took place and inspectors were joined by the deputy headteacher or senior staff for some of these activities.
- Inspectors looked at a range of evidence, including the academy's self-evaluation documents, achievement plan, pupil progress information, policies for safeguarding, behaviour and curriculum, minutes of the governing body and performance management information.
- Inspectors studied pupils' work and folders.
- Meetings were held with three groups of pupils, senior leaders, subject leaders and representatives of the governing body.
- Pupils from Year 1 and Year 2 read to inspectors.
- Inspectors met with parents at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors took account of the 48 responses to the parents' on-line questionnaire, Parent View, and 44 staff questionnaires. They also received letters from the local national teaching school and a teacher training organisation.

Inspection team

David Turner, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Terence Cook	Additional Inspector
Judith Harrison	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's Church of England Academy is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The school converted to become an academy school in September 2011. When its predecessor school, St Mary's Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- Since its conversion to an academy, the school has grown in size and pupils attend through to the end of Year 6.
- There has been one set of published results for the academy since it opened.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage, while others come from several minority ethnic groups. The number of pupils who speak English as an additional language is well below average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is below average. This additional funding is allocated by the government for pupils looked after by the local authority, those known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils whose parents are serving in the armed forces.
- The proportion of disabled children and those with special educational needs receiving support through school action is above average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The academy meets current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make teaching consistently good or better across the academy by making sure that:
 - teachers plan lessons which support all pupils to work on activities which are suitably demanding for their abilities
 - all teachers make effective use of time so that pupils have the opportunity to learn more deeply and fully
 - marking is clearly focused on what pupils need to do in order to improve their work and teachers check that they do it.
- Raise the achievement of all pupils by:
 - accelerating progress in all subjects across Key Stage 2 especially in writing
 - making sure planning takes into account the full range of pupils' abilities so that pupils make consistent progress across Key Stage 2
 - providing more opportunities for more-able pupils to fully develop their extended writing skills.
- Improve the leadership and management of the school by making sure that:
 - improvement plans have a sharper focus on Key Stage 2 achievement and teaching, particularly in writing
 - when they observe lessons, leaders give more consideration to how well the teaching promotes pupils' achievement and the quality of learning and work in their books
 - all leaders including governors, are supported to see the link between teaching quality and pupil achievement with greater accuracy.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- The rate at which pupils make progress varies too much across the academy. Pupils do not make consistent progress in the different subjects, particularly writing, because teaching has not been sufficiently challenging nor has it met the needs of all pupils. This is especially so in Key Stage 2.
- Key Stage 2 achievement has been lower than in Key Stage 1 and the academy recognises this in its self-evaluation. The current Year 6 are the first in the academy to take end of Key Stage 2 tests. Test results for 2013 indicate they are likely to be below average. Information about progress shared with inspectors gives rates of progress in reading and mathematics that are in line with normal expectations while progress in writing is lower. Taking into account their starting points in September 2011 when they joined the academy, Year 6 achievement is not good.
- Year 4 achievement is similar to that seen in Year 6 while Year 5 achievement is below expected. Pupils' achievement in writing in Key Stage 2 is lower than that seen in reading and in mathematics because of inconsistencies in teaching over time and marking which has not given effective guidance on how to improve. Pupils' written work in Key Stage 2 shows strength in some subjects such as religious education because of the quality of teaching. In other areas, the more able are capable of extending their writing to a higher level than is currently expected.
- Achievement has improved quickly in Key Stage 1. In 2012, Year 2 pupils reached standards which were below average for reading and broadly average for writing and mathematics. They have gone on to make better progress in Year 3. First results for tests in 2013 indicate that Year 2 pupils are likely to have reached above average standards in reading, writing and mathematics, representing good progress against their starting points when they joined the academy.
- The results for pupils who took the phonics screening check (the sounds that letters and words make) at the end of Year 1 in 2012 were above the expected standard. Results for 2013 indicate they have improved on last year's scores. This is because the academy gives close attention to pupil skills in this area in earlier years.
- Children enter the Early Years and Foundation stage with skills, knowledge and abilities which are below those that would be expected for their age. However, they make good and in some cases exceptional progress and leave Reception with at least average and in some cases above average skills.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make inconsistent progress, in line with pupils across the academy, especially in writing. They make better progress in Key Stage 1, particularly in reading and mathematics while in Year 3 their progress is good in relation to other pupils nationally. However, in Key Stage 2, their progress is similar to other pupils and requires improvement, particularly in Year 5.
- The achievement of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is similar to other pupils across the academy. They make more progress in Key Stage 1 than Key Stage 2 and writing is the weaker area of achievement. However, the gap between their standards and those of their classmates has been narrowed and is very small or positive, in their favour. Test results for Year 6 indicate they are around one-and-a-half terms ahead in reading, half a term ahead in mathematics and half a term behind in writing.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching has not been consistently strong enough to ensure good progress in all year groups and subjects, particularly writing. Teaching has been more effective in Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2 and this variation means teaching has not been good. There has also been a considerable amount of changes to staffing in the last two years.
- In some lessons, pupils fail to make enough progress because teaching is not challenging enough. Work and activities do not meet their needs and abilities, especially the higher ability pupils. Time is not used well and pupils get fewer opportunities to take their thinking on to a deeper level. Even in some stronger lessons, the organisation of time means that sometimes there is too much work to cover and pupils can lose interest or fall behind.
- The marking of pupils' work is inconsistent and varies in its effectiveness. Frequently, marking tells pupils how they have done but not how to improve their work or performance. This is especially the case in Key Stage 2, where pupils' writing skills need more precise guidance to help them improve.
- Where the best teaching is seen, teachers' subject knowledge is highly effective and planning thoughtfully takes into account the different abilities and needs of pupils. Expectations are high and pupils are encouraged to think and learn for themselves. They are helped to do this because of interesting group work and effective questioning which causes them to think hard and share their thoughts with others as they work.
- In the stronger lessons, teachers often use highly imaginative techniques to capture the students' interest. Learning also takes place in a sensible order so that pupils have a clear understanding about their progress and teachers ask thoughtful questions to check on them as they work. A good example was an outstanding religious education lesson where children used everyday objects to discuss the themes of 'Pilgrimage.'
- Questioning is used to challenge pupils to think in many lessons. Teachers often give time for pupils to think their answers through or discuss them before they speak in front of the class. However, in some lessons, good opportunities are missed to allow pupils to take this further and comment on what their classmates have said.
- Reading is promoted well across the school. Pupils enjoy reading and talking about the books they have chosen from the library or their reading schemes. Some show a high level of understanding about terms such as 'context' in literacy matters while others who read for inspectors showed a good understanding of phonics (the sounds which letters and words make).

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour in and around the academy, in lessons, break and lunchtime is good. Pupils are well-mannered and get on well with one another. They show respect to each other and adults and enjoy making a contribution to the academy community, which has been organised through a strong Christian ethos.
 - Pupils feel safe and well-supported in the event of any problems. They know who they can speak to and are confident they would be helped by adults at the academy. They believe
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bullying is very rare and when it does happen it is dealt with quickly and their teachers help them to put relationships right.

- Pupils are proud of the many different clubs and events they can take part in and are enthusiastic about the responsibilities offered to them. They lead an important school council which has influenced local environmental issues and they are responsible for recycling efforts at the academy. Pupils take these roles seriously and carefully think about how their actions can make a positive difference to the academy.
- Pupils particularly enjoy having mixed break and lunch times with different year groups. This allows them to play together in different groups and older pupils take responsibility for younger ones because of the roles they are given. Pupils really appreciate the new play equipment and the 'Quiet Garden', both of which they helped to bring to the academy.
- Pupils are fully aware of possible dangers to themselves including when they use the internet. They know how to stay safe and have listened to the advice of their teachers.
- Pupils enjoy recognising and celebrating the achievement and value of other people and are encouraged to do so. A good example is in assembly time, when they are able to listen to or watch the performance of others who have been successful in activities which include Young Writers' competitions and film-making.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good and they show enthusiasm and interest in their work. They cooperate with one another and are patient and respectful. In a few lessons, attitudes are less positive when teaching gives pupils fewer opportunities and less time to take their learning on further for themselves. As a result, pupils sometimes lose interest or concentration and need direction from their teachers.
- The academy has worked on developing relationships between pupils and involves parents in this work through its child and family worker. Parents agree that behaviour and relationship issues are well-managed.
- Attendance is above average and this is because of the positive way in which it is encouraged, celebrated and checked upon by staff. Pupils feel safe and happy at the academy and this is another reason why they attend well. The academy works closely with parents to support attendance.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Since conversion to an academy, the school has increased in size to become a complete Key Stage 2 school. It has also experienced considerable changes in staffing. Leaders have been able to secure important improvements in pupil progress, standards and teaching in Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. However, improvements in Key Stage 2 have been slower and less effective. As a result, pupils' achievement is not good.
- Leaders have a generally accurate view of the academy's strengths and weaknesses but evaluation is not sharp enough in the most critical areas of teaching and achievement. When leaders observe teaching, they do not always link their judgement to its effects on pupils' learning and the quality of work. As a result, improvement planning is not having enough impact on pupil achievement, especially in Key Stage 2 and in writing.

- Subject leadership has improved since the academy opened. New leaders have an effective understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of pupil achievement and have helped improve achievement in Key Stage 1. They are regularly held to account for their work and the progress of pupils.
 - Performance management is effective and matched to teacher performance, pupil achievement and the national 'Teachers' Standards'. Potential pay increases are therefore more closely linked to teacher performance and salary increases are not automatic.
 - Parents and staff are highly supportive of the academy. Evidence from staff and parent questionnaires and a letter received from parents were very positive.
 - The range of subjects offered to pupils is broad, balanced and interesting. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to extend their learning beyond the classroom. Good examples include well-attended trips, clubs and philosophy lessons.
 - The academy's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a significant strength. Extremely thoughtful planning and Christian educational values based on the 'whole child' ensure strong personal development. Leaders and governors ensure that there are many opportunities to study the world and existence in ways that lead children to reflect deeply on critical questions and take action. One good example is the desire of Year 6 pupils to 'leave a legacy' behind them as they are the first to pass through the academy. They have established a charitable fund by which future pupils will remember their work and special place in the history of the academy.
 - The academy has made wide use of pupil-premium funding to support smaller class sizes, learning and pastoral services and increased pupil involvement in all areas of extra-curricular life. As a result the progress of some pupils has seen a reduction in the gap between their attainment and that of their classmates.
- **The governance of the school:**
- The governing body is new and developing as the academy develops. Governors bring a wide variety of skills and experience and are committed to their work. Their view of the school is well-supported by first hand evidence because they visit regularly and are closely involved in the work of leaders and teachers. They have a clear awareness of the school's performance data but are not as yet fully using this to judge the overall impact of improvement work undertaken by leaders. Governors have a clear understanding of how the pupil premium is used and its effects. They work effectively with the headteacher on school appraisal and performance management. They know how the school rewards good teachers and tackles underperformance.
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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	137419
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	412906

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	417
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Cox
Headteacher	Wendy Garrard
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01638 713317
Fax number	01638712020
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