

Ashford, St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Western Avenue, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1ND

Inspection dates 8–9 May 2014

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.

- Pupils do not make as much progress as they could from their starting points, especially in writing and mathematics.
- Teaching requires improvement. Teachers do not always have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. As a result, they do not consistently provide work at the right level for all groups of pupils so that they can work productively throughout lessons.
- Teachers do not always explain tasks clearly enough to pupils, or check their learning regularly enough during lessons.
- Teachers do not consistently give pupils sufficiently detailed feedback about their work.
- Leadership and management require improvement. Senior leaders' efforts to ensure that teaching is usually good have not yet been effective enough. Opportunities for teachers to share good practice have not yet had sufficient impact on pupils' learning and progress.
- The school's leaders have not yet succeeded in communicating their ambitions for the school and their expectations to all members of staff, or ensured that all parents and carers are confident that their concerns are listened to and acted upon.

The school has the following strengths:

- Standards in writing and mathematics are rising and pupils are making faster progress, because of better teaching. Pupils throughout the school make good progress in and enjoy reading, because it is well taught.
- Pupils for whom English is an additional language achieve well.
- Pupils feel safe and usually behave well in lessons and around the school. They have few concerns about bullying.
- The school's assessment of pupils' learning and progress and of the quality of teaching has improved and is now accurate.
- The school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Pupils from different backgrounds get on very well together.
- Leaders and managers, working closely with the governing body, have put in place robust plans for the school's future development.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 20 lessons, three of them together with the headteacher and other school leaders, for varying amounts of time. They observed all the classes in the school and all the teachers present during the inspection, at least once. They made shorter visits to a number of other lessons and activities, attended an assembly, looked at pupils' written work and listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors held discussions with groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors, and members of staff. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors also held informal discussions with a number of parents and carers.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents, including the school's information on pupils' attainment and progress and data on attendance. They examined safeguarding procedures and records of the school's own lesson observations as well as the school's self-evaluation, performance management and planning documents.
- In planning and carrying out the inspection, inspectors took account of 91 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. They also considered a letter from one parent or care and an email from another, as well as 35 questionnaires completed by members of staff.

Inspection team

Robin Gaff, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Lewis

Additional Inspector

Ann Short

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. A below-average proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language, most of whom are from Nepalese backgrounds, is below the national average.
- About one in five pupils is eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional funding provided for children in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals. This proportion is below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs who are supported through school action is below the national average. Just over one in eight pupils is supported through school action. The proportion of pupils, just under one in 20, who are being supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is well below the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- There is an on-site nursery, which is managed by a private company. A breakfast club and an after-school club are also managed separately. These are subject to separate inspection arrangements.
- Since the school's previous inspection, there have been several changes in staffing. These include the headteacher, who was appointed in September 2012, and a number of senior and middle leaders. There have also been changes in the membership of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enable all groups of pupils to make consistently good or better progress, by ensuring that teachers regularly:
 - give pupils work which engages them fully and is well matched to their different levels of ability
 - explain lesson activities clearly to pupils, check how well they are learning, and adapt when necessary the tasks they have set
 - give pupils sufficiently detailed comments when marking their written work so that they can build on their strengths and to know what they need to do to improve
 - benefit fully from opportunities to share examples of successful practice.
- Improve the effectiveness with which leaders communicate:
 - to staff, what they expect of them, and their ambitions for the school
 - to parents, their willingness to listen to and act upon their concerns.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- When they join the Reception classes, children's levels of knowledge and skills, although they vary from year to year, are broadly in line with those expected for their age. By the end of Year 6, pupils from different backgrounds and with different levels of ability reach average standards in reading, writing and mathematics. This indicates that they have not made good enough progress from their starting points in writing and mathematics, and that their achievement requires improvement.
- Pupils do not consistently make as much progress as they could in lessons, because teachers' expectations of what they can achieve are not always high enough.
- In the Reception classes, children make adequate, and in some cases good or better progress in learning to link letters and sounds, as well as to count and to measure. They also develop their ability to work together and on their own, and to play sensibly and safely.
- In recent years, pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 1 has typically been in line with national expectations, although in 2013 it was below average. From 2011 to 2013, pupils' results in national assessments at the end of Year 6 showed that their attainment, while continuing to be average, fell in both reading and mathematics.
- The school's own accurate assessment of current pupils' attainment, however, as well as inspectors' examination of their work, show that the school has succeeded in reversing this decline. It also demonstrates that pupils are now making faster progress in both writing and mathematics.
- By the end of Year 6, pupils have learned to read fluently and accurately. They benefit from the good range of books which the school makes available to them, and pupils throughout the school talk enthusiastically about the books they have read.
- The achievement of the most-able pupils in the school has been similar to that of their classmates, although their progress, including in mathematics, has improved in recent years. This trend is continuing, as was evident in a Year 6 lesson, where high-attaining pupils showed that they had gained a good grasp of calculation skills. This was because the teacher continually checked their progress and made sure that pupils had plenty of opportunities to practise what they had learned.
- Pupils for whom English is an additional language make good progress in both English and mathematics. They settle in quickly and benefit from good additional support if they need it. This demonstrates the school's effective promotion of equality of opportunity.
- In 2013 the attainment of those pupils who were eligible for the pupil premium was below that of other pupils in the school and of all pupils nationally. In English and mathematics, these pupils were just under a term behind others in the school and two and a half terms behind all pupils nationally. Their results, however, were above those of the equivalent group in 2012, and the standards reached by current pupils show that the attainment of this group is continuing to rise.
- The school makes good use of additional pupil premium funding, for example by giving eligible pupils throughout the school additional teaching in English and mathematics. This has speeded up their progress, and demonstrates the school's success in closing the gaps between this group's achievement and that of other pupils.
- The progress made by disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is also improving, so that they are now achieving as well as other pupils. This is because teachers and teaching assistants are making sure that these pupils receive the extra support they need and that they are fully included in all classroom activities.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it has not yet resulted in good achievement for pupils. This is partly due to weak teaching in the past, the effects of which have not yet been fully overcome.
- Teachers do not always expect pupils to work hard enough, or give them sufficiently demanding tasks. Teachers' explanations of activities do not consistently ensure that pupils know exactly what they are intended to learn and what they are meant to do. This results in slower progress and, on a few occasions, causes pupils to lose focus and become distracted from their work.
- Teachers do not consistently check pupils' learning and progress during lessons or adapt tasks when they are proving too hard or too easy for some groups of pupils. This limits the progress that some of them are able to make, including the most-able pupils.
- Teachers mark pupils' written work regularly and accurately. They do not always, however, give pupils detailed enough comments on what they have done well and what they can do to make their work even better. As a result, pupils do not always know their strengths or how to improve their work.
- Leaders believe, and inspectors agree, that the quality of teaching across the school is improving. The school has increased the accuracy of teachers' judgements of the standards which pupils are reaching and some teachers are making good use of this information in planning lesson activities.
- Teachers have a good knowledge of, and are enthusiastic about, the different subjects they teach. They ensure that pupils gain a sound grasp of facts and ideas, for example in science and physical education.
- The teaching of phonics (the links between sounds and letters) in Reception and Key Stage 1 is good. This enables pupils to master the basic techniques they need to read and write successfully, and helps them to make increasingly good progress in these vital skills. Together with improvements in the teaching of mathematics, this is leading to pupils being better prepared for the next stage of their education.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are keen to learn. Their positive attitudes in class contribute to their progress and to a calm and orderly atmosphere in lessons. Pupils arrive in good time for school and are punctual to lessons following breaks. There is no sign of any litter around the school.
- Disruption to lessons is rare and very little time is lost because of it. When, occasionally, pupils' behaviour is less than good, this is usually because teachers do not require them to work as hard as they could.
- Pupils are respectful to teachers and considerate of one another. They make good use of the opportunities they are given to take on responsibility, for example as play leaders. Pupils from different backgrounds relate well to one another and learn to appreciate each other's different traditions. This results in a happy and harmonious atmosphere, and shows pupils' good moral and social development.
- The school's management of the behaviour of those pupils who find it difficult to conform to its rules is good. As a result, exclusions are rare.
- Pupils' attendance is well above the national average and has continued to rise in recent years.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils say they feel safe in school and most parents and carers agree. They know how to keep themselves and others safe in different situations. For example, in a physical education lesson, Year 6 pupils learned the importance of balance and control in avoiding any harm in gymnastics activities.
- Pupils understand about different types of bullying, such as persistent name calling and cyber bullying, but they say it happens only rarely. They know exactly what to do if it does occur, and are confident that staff will help them to resolve any difficulties quickly and effectively.

The leadership and management require improvement

- The school is emerging from a period of turbulence caused by changes in staffing, some of which could not have been foreseen. School leaders and members of the governing body are determined to ensure that pupils receive the best education the school can provide. Their actions have not yet, however, resulted in teaching being consistently good or in pupils achieving well.
- Teachers have not fully benefitted from opportunities to share and develop the good practice which exists in the school. This limits their impact on pupils' progress and the extent to which good teaching can flourish throughout the school.
- The school's leaders have not persuaded all members of staff that they are taking the right steps to improve teaching and are providing teachers and teaching assistants with appropriate training and support. Similarly, a significant minority of those parents and carers who responded to the online survey are not convinced that leaders do enough to respond to their concerns.
- The school's senior team and the governing body fully understand that they need to improve communication both with parents and carers and with some members of staff, and are already taking steps to do so. Their evaluation of the school's performance in this and other respects is now accurate.
- Middle leaders, including those who are very or relatively new to their posts, are playing an increasingly effective part in improving the quality of teaching. They are enthusiastic about their roles and report that they feel well supported by the senior team, whose vision they fully share.
- Senior leaders have put in place good systems for managing the performance of staff, including regular observations of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work. Staff now have clear targets linked to pupils' achievement and the headteacher makes sure that pay increases are only given when staff have made good progress towards meeting them. She has also acted decisively to tackle weak teaching.
- The local authority has kept a close eye on the school's performance. It has helped leaders to improve the accuracy of their assessment of pupils' progress and of their judgements about the quality of teaching.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and meets current requirements. Leaders are well aware of the need to ensure that all subjects contribute fully to improving pupils' achievement.
- The school provides a good range of out-of-school clubs. These enable pupils to learn to play musical instruments, for example, and to take part in a range of sports. Leaders have used the extra primary school sports funding well to develop the expertise of staff. This is already having a positive impact on pupils' competence and on their appreciation of the importance of physical exercise in developing a healthy lifestyle.
- Pupils benefit from a variety of special events, including trips and visits. The school makes good use of some of the pupil premium funding to ensure that no pupil is prevented from participating in them for financial reasons.
- The school's strong promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development contributes well to their good behaviour. Assemblies, for example, help pupils to understand the difference between right and wrong. Pupils learn the importance of appreciating different cultures, and there is no sign of discrimination.
- Although a minority of parents and carers do not share their views, a number went out of their way to tell inspectors how much they appreciated the help the school had given them and their children.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors, including those new to their role, know how well pupils are achieving and how their performance compares to that of pupils in other schools. They also know how good the teaching is and what senior staff are doing to improve it, including by linking pay rises to teachers' targets. Their knowledge and expertise in different fields help them to challenge senior staff when appropriate, and to support them. Together with the school's leaders, they have correctly identified priorities for further improvement and made robust plans to

implement them. These factors, as well as those noted above, confirm that the school has the capacity to improve further. Governors ensure that the school's finances are sound and that its safeguarding arrangements meet requirements.

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	118738
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	444017

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	421
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Critchley
Headteacher	Kate Harper
Date of previous school inspection	10–11 June 2010
Telephone number	01233 625531
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