

Aston St Mary's Church of England Aided Primary School

School Lane, Aston, Stevenage, SG2 7HA

Inspection dates 11–12 December 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Early years provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher is an inspirational leader. She is very effectively supported by the other highly effective leaders, governors and staff. As a result, all aspects of the school have improved and are now outstanding.
- The governing body uses the wide range of its members' skills very well to support and challenge the leaders consistently and effectively.
- The curriculum provides pupils with an exciting array of subjects that are planned very effectively to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary. This contributes considerably to the school's harmonious environment and pupils' achievement. They are very considerate of others and readily help each other to learn.
- Pupils feel safe and secure because the school's work to keep them safe and secure is outstanding.
- Pupils' achievement is outstanding. All pupils, including those who are supported by extra funds, the disabled and those who have special educational needs, make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Standards by the end of Year 6 are high. In reading, in 2014, the average was more than a year ahead of most Year 6 pupils' nationally.
- Teaching is outstanding as a result of leaders' rigorous checks on teachers' performance and a wide range of opportunities for training. Teachers expect the pupils to do their very best in class. Pupils respond by always aiming high and trying hard. Leaders are fully aware of remaining refinements needed, in teachers' marking.
- Children make outstanding progress in Reception and develop their reading and writing skills very effectively and rapidly.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed six lessons, of which four were seen together with the headteacher. In addition, the inspector made a number of other short visits to lessons and learning areas, and heard pupils in Years 2 and 6 reading.
- Meetings were held with a group of pupils, members of staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and another governor, and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector took account of the 29 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and 16 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspector looked at pupils' books and a range of documents, including the school's own data on pupils' current attainment and progress, the school's evaluation of its performance, school improvement planning, documentation relating to teachers' performance over time, and records relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Tusha Chakraborti, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized primary school. Pupils are taught in five mixed-age classes. These are for Reception-age children, and for pupils in Years 1 and 2, Years 2 and 3, Years 3 and 4 and Years 5 and 6.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. Few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and a small number of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- Approximately a seventh of the pupils are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for disadvantaged pupils. This is a below-average proportion.
- Around a ninth of the pupils are disabled or have special educational needs. This is broadly average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school is a member of a local primary and secondary schools consortium.
- Several pupils leave the school at the end of Year 4 to join middle schools in the area.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build on the high quality of teaching by insisting on high standards of presentation and spelling in pupils' workbooks.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The leadership and management are highly effective in driving improvement. The headteacher, other leaders and managers at all levels, and the governors, make sure that staff work closely as a strong team and there is a real atmosphere of 'can do'. As a member of staff commented, 'The school has ensured a consistent approach in all subjects making it an excellent place for pupils to learn and excel'. The school's evaluation of its work is accurate and leads to apt priorities for improvement.
- Leaders ensure that rigorous monitoring of teaching has enhanced its quality and its impact on pupils' achievement. They use very effective systems to improve teachers' performance, setting objectives that are linked directly to pupils' achievement and professional development. This has resulted in sustaining high standards of teaching and attainment. Teachers fully understand the link between the effectiveness of their performance and any pay rises or promotion.
- The school's rich curriculum widens the experience of pupils and creates many opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of their community and the wider world. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain. A good range of subjects promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very effectively. Assemblies and religious studies provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on teachings from the core values of different religions. There is a strong focus on teaching science, music and art.
- The school places very strong emphasis on promoting equal opportunities for all its pupils. Leaders and teachers assess the progress of each pupil rigorously and regularly. Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used extremely well to ensure these pupils attain the same standards as others. For all pupils, any signs of underachievement are addressed effectively through appropriate teaching programmes, such as small group or one-to-one adult support.
- The school makes excellent use of additional funding for sports to employ specialist coaches to work alongside teachers to increase their skills and work directly with pupils. The funds have also been used to extend the opportunities for competitive and non-competitive sports for all pupils. As a result, pupil participation is now high and pupils enjoy a range of inter-school competitions.
- The arrangements for safeguarding children are clear and well-understood by all staff. Staff are trained at appropriate intervals and thoroughly understand the requirements and procedures.
- The school works closely with the local authority and uses its expertise regularly. Staff benefit from training that is planned within the strong partnership of local schools. The school receives a great deal of support from the Diocese of St Albans in extending pupils' spiritual development.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The new Chair worked closely with the headteacher, even before he took up this post, in his capacity as a governor to improve the roles of the governing body. The governing body is now highly effective in monitoring the school's performance. The governors now use their skills and experience effectively to influence the school's work. They are very well informed about how well the school is performing through their regular visits, and through checking data and reports from the headteacher and other leaders. They use this information effectively to hold the school to account for school improvement. They have clear understanding of the quality of teaching in the school and the link between teachers' performance and salary progression. They help the school tackle any underperformance rigorously. They ensure that pupil premium funding is used efficiently to support the pupils for whom it is intended, and they assess its impact on their achievement. Governors have undertaken training in safer recruitment and child protection and fulfil their statutory duties for safeguarding pupils.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils are always polite and display a high level of engagement in their learning. They appreciate and value what exemplary behaviour means, not only in school, but in understanding British values and the diversity in British society. They are very pleased with their link with a school in India because it helps them build relationships and understanding of diversity. They proudly narrated the positive experience they had when a visitor talked to them about this school and about lifestyles in India. They learned much about each other from the exchange of hand-made calendars between the two schools which encouraged closer links.
- Pupils are very proud of 'The Aston Tree of Life' in which each leaf represents a pupil in the school. They confidently talk about the school values written on the tree to which they contributed fully. This reflects the school's strong emphasis on high standards of behaviour and on promoting pupils, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils are keen to show their high standards of behaviour in taking on responsibilities such as being members of the school council, the 'eco club' and raising funds for national and international charities. Recently they raised funds for The Rainforest Foundation. They take on daily responsibilities very maturely, such as switching lights off and looking after the compost bins for gardening.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils say they feel extremely safe and very well cared for by all the adults in the school. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the questionnaires agree that their children feel safe at school at all times.
- Pupils develop an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe. They are fully aware of the different types of bullying. They know the dangers posed by misuse of the internet and social networking sites and what to do if they should encounter any 'cyber bullying'. They say that bullying of any kind rarely happens and are confident that teachers and other adults deal with it very efficiently and quickly, should they encounter it.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teachers and other adults have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They listen to pupils' views and value their contributions. As a result, pupils rise to the challenging tasks they are given and make rapid gains in their learning. The particularly well-targeted use of highly-trained additional adults is a key feature of teaching across the school. Excellent relationships between adults and pupils help all the pupils to make rapid progress in a warm and supportive atmosphere.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. They use information from assessment very effectively to plan lessons that build successfully on what their pupils already have learned. For example, in an English lesson, pupils in the mixed Years 2 and 3 class discussed the use of descriptive words and literary devices. Together, they built on their learning by transforming the sentence 'The iceberg floats on the sea' to 'the colossal iceberg floats gracefully like a creamy white swan on the glittery blue sea.'
- Teaching assistants work closely and effectively with teachers in planning and delivering lessons. They are highly skilled in providing help and guidance for pupils who have special educational needs and those who are supported by the pupil premium.
- Teachers ask questions highly effectively to extend and challenge pupils' learning, developing their thinking skills well and enabling them to apply their knowledge and skills they learnt in the previous lessons. This was seen in a mathematics lesson, where pupils in the mixed Years 5 and 6 class, made rapid gain in understanding how to calculate two decimal points, rounding these up to the next whole number. Pupils are involved in checking each other's work and suggesting ways for further improvement. This fosters a very positive learning environment where pupils benefit from each other's ideas and develop good independent skills.

- Teachers' consistently evaluative and informative marking helps pupils very well to understand the next steps needed to so they improve their learning and achieve their targets. Leaders are aware, through their own rigorous checks, that marking does not always identify spelling mistakes and does not promote high quality in pupils' presentation skills consistently and rigorously.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- All groups of pupils make outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics during their time in the school, regardless of ability or background. Over the past two years, the school took decisive actions to improve pupils' achievement. As a result, pupils' progress accelerated markedly in these two years. The work in pupils' books from the last academic year and from the current term show that all pupils make rapid and sustained progress in each year group.
- By the end of Years 2 and 6 in 2014, pupils reached standards in reading, writing and mathematics that were significantly above the national average. By the end of both key stages, all pupils achieved at least the typical level of attainment in all three subjects, with above average proportions exceeding them.
- Pupils develop their writing skills very well because they use their skills in writing across a range of different subjects. For example, in science, they write up their investigative work using technical detail that demonstrates their ability to write well for different purposes.
- A strong focus on phonics (the linking of sounds and letters) has ensured excellent progress in developing reading skills in Year 1. All pupils in Year 1 achieved the expected level in the phonics screening check in 2014. Standards in reading in Years 6 in 2014 were over a year ahead of most pupils of the same age nationally, on average.
- The most able pupils make outstanding progress in all areas. In 2014, the proportion achieving Level 5 or above was above the national average in writing and mathematics. In reading, the proportion was twice the national average.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make excellent progress in all years from their starting points. This is because they receive very effective support from skilled teachers and teaching assistants through a well-planned intervention programme.
- Disadvantaged pupils, who are supported by the pupil premium, make the same outstanding progress as others. This is because of the highly effective way they are supported by teachers and teaching assistants. The very small number of pupils in Year 6 means that their attainment cannot be reported without the risk of identifying individual pupils.

The early years provision

is outstanding

- The Early Years Foundation Stage is managed very effectively. There is a strong teamwork and an excellent ratio of staff to children. Staff work very effectively to engage parents with their children's learning. For example, parents are invited to spend a short time with their children in their class every morning to help them with activities to further develop their fine motor skills. Children's work in their learning journals are shared with parents and parents' contributions regarding their children's progress are included.
- Children's behaviour is excellent. They settle quickly into their daily routines and form excellent relationships with adults and each other. They are polite to adults and work well together. Staff are particularly successful in creating a very caring and positive environment where children feel secure to ask questions and engage in their learning. Children's health, safety and well-being are always of utmost importance to staff. All the children are kept very safe and secure.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers plan a wide range of stimulating activities that capture children's

imagination and fully engage their interests. Children are encouraged to become confident in pursuing indoor and outdoor activities that match their own interests as well as those directed by adults. Adults keep a very close check on how well children are doing. This information is used very effectively to plan the next steps for learning. Careful questioning and discussion continually develop children's language and communication skills.

- Children start in Reception with skills that are broadly in line with those typical for their age in all areas except in literacy which is below the level typical for their age. They make outstanding progress during their stay in Reception. Regular teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) supports children very well in rapidly developing their reading and writing skills. Many show a great deal of interest in writing and are able to write short sentences recounting stories they read. The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development by the end of Reception is above the national average. Children are very well prepared for entry to Year 1.

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	117421
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	448482

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	109
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Martin
Headteacher	Julie Winwood
Date of previous school inspection	18 May 2010
Telephone number	01438 880212
Fax number	N/A
Email address	admin@astonmarys.herts.sch.uk

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