

Little Marlow Church of England School

School Lane, Little Marlow, Buckinghamshire, SL7 3SA

Inspection dates 10–11 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Teaching has improved considerably and is good. It meets pupils' needs well and pupils enjoy their learning.
- Pupils achieve well in English and mathematics.
- Sports provision is particularly good and pupils are active.
- Pupils' behaviour has much improved and is good.
- The school looks after the pupils well and they feel safe, happy and secure.
- Attendance has improved and is now above average.
- Parents like the school and are getting increasingly involved in it.
- Pupils enjoy a wide range of interesting lessons and activities, as well as visits out of school.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs are provided for well and make good progress.
- Pupils get off to a good start in the well-managed Reception class.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work together really well as a team in lessons.
- The school is well led and governed. The interim headteacher has continued and developed the work of her predecessor very effectively. Governors ensure the new federation is working well.
- The interim headteacher evaluates the school accurately, knowing strengths and weaknesses.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Boys do not do as well as girls in English and girls do not do as well as boys in mathematics.
- The school does not yet evaluate the impact of pupil premium expenditure.
- In her written reports, the interim headteacher tends to emphasise the school's strengths more than its weaknesses.
- Teaching assistants do not always ask sophisticated enough questions to deepen fully pupils' learning.
- Leadership of all the subjects, although improving, is not yet sufficiently well developed to ensure that the subject content in all lessons is rich and challenging.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector gathered a wide range of evidence about the school and also considered information from his previous monitoring visits.
- He observed several lessons in all classes, all jointly with the interim headteacher. He talked with pupils, looked at their work and heard some of them read. He observed the pupils while they played together and attended two assemblies.
- The inspector evaluated school documentation, including the improvement plan, minutes of meetings and data showing the pupils' progress.
- He held meetings with staff, governors, parents and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector also analysed eight confidential questionnaires received from members of staff and 62 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

Robin Hammerton, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- This is a small infant school, with three classes. The Reception class is full time. The school was judged to require special measures in January 2013. Since then, its progress has been monitored by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, who also led this full inspection.
- Since January 2015, the school has been led by an interim headteacher. Her substantive post is deputy headteacher at nearby Holy Trinity Junior School, with which Little Marlow School federated in autumn 2014, sharing a governing body.
- Almost all pupils are White British and live in nearby villages. No pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportions of disabled pupils and those identified as having special educational needs are in line with the national average.
- A very small number of disadvantaged pupils are entitled to the support of the pupil premium.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management further by:
 - investigating in greater depth the causes of the differences in attainment of boys and girls and then taking further clear action to raise all pupils' achievement to the highest level
 - developing the roles of all subject leaders, so that lessons across the curriculum all have rich specific subject content
 - ensuring that reports written by the headteacher and senior staff fully explain the weaknesses in the school as well as the strengths so that it is clear where further improvements need to be made.
- Improve teaching further by training and supporting teaching assistants to ask more challenging and open questions of pupils, so that their thinking and learning become deeper.
- Ensuring that the impact of pupil premium funding on the achievement and wellbeing of disadvantaged pupils is fully evaluated.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The interim headteacher leads well. In her short time in office, she has learned quickly about the school and its age range, building well on the helpful legacy of her predecessor. This transition has been well managed and seamless. It reflects very well on the federation.
- Senior leaders work hard and successfully with staff to sustain and improve the quality of teaching. Feedback and training for staff are effective. Staff feel happy and well supported.
- The school's main strategic plan is clear, succinct and well-constructed, and brings improvement. It is linked closely to leaders' targets for staff.
- Reports on the school by the interim headteacher are thorough and identify strengths and weaknesses aptly. However, more is made of the strengths than of the weaknesses, making it a little harder to show where further improvements need to be made.
- Pupil premium funding is used to provide specific support for the very small number of pupils entitled to it. The school has not yet, however, started to analyse the impact of this expenditure on the outcomes for these pupils. Consequently, senior staff and governors do not know how well it is being spent.
- Senior leaders, with the skilled special educational needs coordinator, promote equality of opportunity, foster good relations and tackle discrimination with determination. Nevertheless, despite trying different strategies, they have not yet resolved the differences in attainment between boys and girls.
- Middle leadership is developing well. All subjects have leaders. These leaders have ensured that the curriculum is broad and interesting. Pupils are keen to talk about good learning experiences, such as recent project work on the First World War. However, the leadership of every subject is not yet robust enough to ensure that all lessons have equally strong subject specific content to help pupils learn as well as they could. Leaders are aware that there are opportunities for staff across the federation to work together to improve this.
- Staff plan the curriculum carefully to enable pupils to understand appropriately life in modern Britain and fundamental British values, such as tolerance and respect. Pupils learn systematically about different religions and cultures. Assemblies and lessons contain clear moral and spiritual themes.
- Arrangements for safeguarding pupils have improved and are robust. The interim headteacher is appropriately trained as the designated officer. Staff understand their roles correctly. The special educational needs co-ordinator communicates safeguarding issues well to teaching assistants.
- The local authority has provided considerable support throughout the school's time in special measures. This has been useful and constructive in supporting the considerable improvements made.
- Parents are increasingly pleased with the school and are becoming more involved. Senior leaders have taken useful steps to enable staff to develop their confidence in involving parents. The parent teacher association is growing. Parents like the regular newsletters from the school, which helpfully include information about what pupils are learning.
- The school spends its sports premium funding well. It has clear evidence of improved participation by all pupils in a wide range of sporting activity in and out of school hours. This has become a real strength.
- The school environment continues to improve. Thoughtful building and landscaping work is enabling the school to make the best use of its facilities and grounds.
- Pupils are introduced appropriately to different jobs that adults do and are beginning to understand the workplace.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The new federation governing body is well led. It takes its responsibilities to the school very seriously. Its members visit regularly, take account of the wishes and needs of the community, and can ask searching questions of senior leaders, including about the differences in boys' and girls' attainment. However, these questions and answers are not precisely recorded in meeting minutes which makes it harder for governors to help secure improvements.
 - Through their active engagement, governors know the school well, including how teaching has improved. They have arranged that robust procedures are in place to manage the performance of staff to ensure that good teaching is suitably rewarded through pay progression and that any underperformance is tackled.
 - Governors are leading the school community through a period of significant change astutely and with compelling strategic thinking. One of their most important responsibilities is to ensure that the rapid improvements in the school are sustained and built on. They are increasingly realising that clear leadership is vital for this and that senior leaders must have both the capacity and time to continue to

develop the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons is careful, attentive and keen. Pupils, in all classes, show the ability to work individually and collaboratively. They remain focused, even without direct adult attention.
- The inspector observed occasional short-lived minor misbehaviour, such as distracting others, running in a corridor and noisiness entering a classroom. Pupils confirm that such behaviour occurs occasionally but is not the norm.
- In the assemblies observed, pupils listened carefully to interesting stories, such as *The Straight Line Wonder*. Their attentive behaviour helped them learn about courage and taking considered risks in social situations.
- The pupils who met with inspectors say that bullying or unpleasant behaviour can occur but is rare. Staff deal with it well. The school's records support this.
- Pupils take on real responsibilities. For example, the pupil school improvement team take forward other pupils' suggestions and worries. Other pupils enjoy helping, by laying tables, for example.
- Attendance has improved and is now above average. The school is developing more robust but supportive methods of reaching out to any families where children's attendance is too low.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good.
- Pupils feel safe and happy. They look after each other. Those who met with the inspector could explain, at an appropriate level, how to use the internet safely.
- Staff offer pupils significant freedoms to choose and use a wide range of play equipment. They do so calmly, carefully and kindly, understanding the risks which have been explained to them. Pupils play well together in the playground, showing concern for each other.
- The school has suitably robust safeguarding procedures. Senior leaders are aware of the published weaknesses identified by Ofsted in the local authority's work in this aspect. They take these weaknesses into account and can show that where there are any concerns about pupils' safety, they address them appropriately.

The quality of teaching is good

- Across the classes, pupils enjoy constructive relationships with adults. The staff have high expectations of pupils. They provide work which is well suited to the different needs of pupils and manage behaviour in a friendly but appropriately assertive style.
- Teachers' planning is thorough. This makes lessons purposeful and well-paced so pupils learn effectively. Teachers and teaching assistants understand their respective roles and what they are seeking to achieve when working with individuals or groups of pupils.
- The clear improvements made in teaching over the last two years have ensured consequent improvements in the pupils' work and performance in literacy and mathematics.
- The school teaches reading particularly well. In reading sessions, for example, pupils learn well technical aspects, such as spelling rules, as well as how to enjoy and appreciate the texts they meet.
- In a Year 2 English lesson, higher achieving pupils made good progress developing their comprehension skills and improved their vocabulary, through a well-structured task about the footballer Lionel Messi. Of the pupils involved, however, 11 were girls and five were boys. The school cannot yet fully explain why this imbalance exists (in this class and also in Year 1) and whether more boys should be able to work at higher levels in English. Similarly, the school cannot yet say how girls might do better in mathematics.
- The teaching of phonics (linking letters and sounds) has improved this year. Pupils are taught in carefully organised groups, depending on their needs. In group sessions, they focus well and show fair ability to use their phonic knowledge. For example, two higher attaining Reception children were present in a Year 1 group led by a teaching assistant. Pupils used and read words containing the 'ee' sound correctly and enthusiastically.

- Teachers and teaching assistants work particularly well together. Teaching assistants know exactly which pupils they are supporting and what these pupils need to achieve. This support helps the pupils make good progress. However, quite often teaching assistants do not ask questions of pupils which fully extend their thinking.
- Staff mark pupils' work thoroughly. Pupils often make immediate improvements based on the comments.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- In the 2014 Year 2 national assessments, there was clear improvement, with pupils attaining higher than average results in reading and writing. Girls clearly outperformed boys. Two in every five pupils gained above average scores in reading. In mathematics, however, pupils' attainment, while improved, was closer to the national average, with boys performing as well as girls.
- These improvements are sustained amongst current Year 2 pupils. The school reasonably expects a further improvement in assessment results this year.
- The needs of more able pupils are well met. Teachers' expectations have risen and these pupils achieve well. Many pupils are working at high levels in reading, writing and mathematics this year. Their classwork is of a good standard. The 2014 Year 1 phonics screening, however, showed that too few pupils knew more complex letter patterns. The school has taken firm steps to resolve this through its new system for phonics teaching.
- The gender differences persist in the current Year 1 and Year 2 classes, though are much less marked in the Reception class. Boys are currently achieving better than girls in mathematics in Year 2. This pattern does not show that pupils are underachieving. Where boys do less well than girls or vice versa, their achievement is still generally good, but clearly not as good as that of pupils of the other gender.
- The Year 2 pupils whom the inspector heard read showed confidence and enjoyment. One pupil said that books take you 'to another world'. Their reading books, which they take home regularly, were demanding for their individual abilities, indicating the school's high expectations. The pupils were able to read accurately, sounding out many words, and they could often self-correct where needed. Their comprehension of the texts was good.
- The gap between the achievement of the very small number of pupils entitled to pupil premium funding and the others is mixed but small. The school uses the funding appropriately but has not yet analysed clearly the impact of this expenditure on the outcomes for these pupils.
- Staff know the needs of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs well and meet these needs closely. These pupils make good progress, at least in line with their classmates.
- In some subjects beyond English and mathematics, pupils' achievement is mixed. Occasionally, where teachers' subject knowledge is less secure, pupils' progress is not as strong. In a science lesson, for example, pupils learned reasonably effectively about the importance of washing but there was scope for even deeper learning. In a religious education lesson, the resources were too limited to develop fully pupils' thinking about Jesus, the good friend. This is why middle leadership needs to continue to improve.
- Worshipful singing in assemblies by pupils in all year groups is accurate, well controlled and enthusiastic. This is a considerable improvement and contributes well to pupils' spiritual and social development.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school has worked hard to develop these aspects. As a church school, the school allows all pupils daily opportunities to reflect and pray. It also ensures that pupils develop clear awareness of people's lives elsewhere in the world and that pupils understand and consider social and moral issues.

The early years provision

is good

- The Reception classroom and outdoor area is a calm, safe, attractive and well organised environment for young children to learn in. Children make good progress from their very mixed starting points.
- The class teacher, and the overseeing assistant headteacher, manage the class very well. Planning is very thorough and ensures that children enjoy a good range of activity across all areas of learning.
- Teaching is good. It is well focused and draws out children's understanding and thinking well. Teaching assistants understand their roles and responsibilities well and make a good contribution under the teacher's direction. As in the rest of the school, there is scope to develop further their questioning skills.
- Children enjoy making choices about their learning, taking some genuine responsibility.

- Staff take good account of the interests of the children in their planning and teaching. The current 'circus' topic is successfully promoting good learning and is enjoyed by the children. For example, pupils enjoyed exploring and using balloons and puppets, describing and writing about these experiences.
- All staff assess children's needs very well. They use these assessments to inform future planning.
- As in the rest of the school, the Reception class is safely managed. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities appropriately.
- Staff have worked hard and successfully to involve parents better in planning to meet their children's needs together.

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	110466
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	401127

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pam Fawcett
Headteacher	Caroline Lock
Date of previous school inspection	30 January 2013
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