

# Ashford St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Western Avenue, Ashford, Kent TN23 1ND

<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 June 2016
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The headteacher and governors have focused carefully and successfully on teaching quality and the areas for improvement identified during the previous inspection and areas decided for themselves. The deputy headteacher provides strong support.
- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. At the end of Year 2, they attain in line with national expectations. Standards at the end of Year 6 are similar to the national average.
- The school's approach to teaching phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) is effective. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in the phonics screening test has risen and is now above average.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers are becoming adept at monitoring pupils' progress during lessons and providing questions at just the right level of difficulty.
- A rigorous programme of coaching and training has raised the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good. An increasing proportion of teaching is outstanding.
- Pupils behave well. Older pupils are kind and friendly to the youngest in school. Pupils feel safe and well looked after.
- Leadership of the early years is effective. Children in the Reception class are looked after extremely well. They are taught effectively. The many imaginative activities stimulate them to learn a range of skills quickly.
- Governors make an effective contribution to school improvement. Working closely with school leaders, they have made good use of the action points from the previous inspection to improve their school. As a result, teaching and pupils' outcomes are good.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils are not always given challenging enough work, especially the most able pupils.
- Writing skills are less advanced than those in reading and mathematics.
- Teachers do not provide pupils with enough information about how they can improve their work.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of teaching, learning and assessment on pupils' outcomes by:
  - increasing the level of challenge, especially for the most able pupils
  - extending the quality of feedback provided to pupils so they know how to improve their work
  - developing the opportunities for pupils to write longer and more complex work.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher has spearheaded many improvements to the school, so that it is now good and has an ambitious culture for further improvement. She has made good use of her experience to restructure the leadership team, so that leaders share in driving forward improvements.
- Leaders evaluate the school's effectiveness honestly and accurately. They know the school's strengths and areas for further development. Subsequent improvement plans are detailed and focus clearly on the actions required to ensure improved outcomes for pupils.
- Teacher performance is rigorously checked. Action taken has led to its improvement across the school since the previous inspection. Leaders are clear where strengths lie and how they secure improvements where less effective practice exists.
- Middle leaders provide well-focused support for subject leaders. In turn, subject leaders assist teachers in how best to develop pupils' knowledge in the subjects they manage. Subject leaders sensibly follow this up by monitoring and evaluating the impact of their support on pupils' learning. This has led to better teaching in, for example, science and art.
- School leaders have implemented an extensive programme of coaching and development to improve teachers' skills. They have very high expectations and have established an ethos in which only the best will do. Consequently, teachers are enthusiastic and see training as a means to helping them to become even better teachers.
- Pupils have very good opportunities to develop their understanding of spiritual, social and moral issues. They often cover these topics in assemblies, religious education lessons and as part of the general themes and activities provided during each school day. These help pupils to understand British values well.
- Pupil premium funding is well used to ensure that disadvantaged pupils make good progress. Careful use of the funding ensures that pupils have access to additional support in reading, writing and mathematics. The school ensures that disadvantaged pupils have full access to curriculum enrichment activities. School records show that current gaps between the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and other pupils in the school are small.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Although leaders rightly prioritised improving standards in reading, writing and mathematics when the school was judged to require improvement, other subjects were not sidelined. For example, the provision for sport throughout the school is strong. Leaders employ specialist teachers to provide coaching and mentoring for non-subject specialist teachers on the staff.
- Sport premium funding is used well. Opportunities to participate in competitive sports within school and against other schools have increased, which is developing teamwork skills among pupils. Furthermore, more disadvantaged pupils now attend sports clubs than previously in the last year. Teachers have benefited from observing and receiving guidance from specialist coaches. This has improved teachers' subject knowledge and confidence in teaching a wider range of sports.
- Leaders have effectively reinforced the importance of treating everyone respectfully and tolerantly. To support this, the school's leaders and governors have used robust sanctions where pupils have been intolerant. As a result, pupils are clear that the British values presented well in colourful displays around school need to be adhered to by all. Pupils learn about democracy through electing their classmates to the school council.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effectively promoted. Pupils develop a good understanding of, and respect for, people of different faiths and cultures that extend beyond the school environment. Pupils compare Christianity with other world religions, noting similarities and respecting differences sensitively.
- The local authority has provided very effective support since the school was judged to require improvement. This includes reviews of teaching and learning, a review of behaviour and safety and the moderation of teachers' assessments of the standards pupils reach.
- **The governance of the school**
  - Governors understand the school. They know its strengths and what remains to be done to make it even better. They visit often and are highly visible among the school community. They work closely with leaders so they see for themselves how well the school runs on a day-to-day basis. This enables them to provide valuable support to leaders and to ask searching questions to ensure that school improvement continues.

- Governors have a good understanding of school performance information. Governors have developed their expertise and their understanding of the school considerably over the last two years, including in their interrogation of assessment data. This enables them to participate fully in shaping priorities for action.
- Governors check carefully to ensure that the additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils and for sports provision is used well. Their vigilance enables pupils throughout the school to benefit from a wide range of sports and physical activities.
- Records of governors' meetings show that governance now has a sharper focus on planning strategies to help the school to improve. Governors set challenging performance targets, including for pupils who have special educational needs or disabilities and disadvantaged pupils. They check carefully that these targets are being met.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school, with the safety of pupils given very high priority. All staff and governors have had recent training on how to respond if they believe a pupil is at risk from harm. Within school, staff are vigilant and know the procedures to be undertaken should a concern be raised. Records are thorough and show the involvement of external agencies when needed. Leaders and governors have had training on the prevention of extremism and clearly understand the risks posed to pupils.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment** is good

- Teachers and support staff move between individuals and groups so they can focus individual support or provide further questions to make pupils think deeply. They are skilled at building pupils' confidence to try out new ideas and to learn by any mistakes they make.
- Teaching assistants are deployed well to support pupils, particularly those who are in danger of falling behind. As a result, they make a good impact on the learning of pupils they support, enabling them to make good progress in line with others.
- Reading skills, including phonics, are taught well. Staff have good technical expertise and this can lead to pupils receiving helpful information. The teaching of wider reading skills has improved and these sessions are planned well. Inspectors found that pupils read books at just the right level of difficulty. Pupils can read most of the words and use a variety of other strategies, such as reading the words in the text close to an unknown 'tricky' word.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, owing to effective and relevant training. They use this to probe pupils' understanding by asking questions that deepen their knowledge and concepts. Consequently, lessons move at a brisk pace and pupils learn effectively. Just occasionally, the pace of learning slows because the activities pupils do are not always appropriate and time is wasted.
- Pupils generally write well, confidently applying their grammatical knowledge to ensure their writing has an increasingly powerful impact. Teachers use examples of writing, from both pupils and professional writers, to good effect. They pose probing questions to pupils about the examples of good writing to ensure they understand how writers create layers of meaning through the language they use. However, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to create extended pieces of writing.
- In mathematics lessons, pupils have the opportunity to develop their fluency and reasoning. Pupils particularly enjoy developing their problem-solving skills, especially those relating to real-life situations, and do so accurately. Links between mathematics and other subjects such as science help pupils to apply and improve their numeracy skills.
- Sometimes, there is insufficient challenge for pupils and they do not make the progress of which they are capable. A check of pupils' workbooks showed that the most able pupils often complete the same work as other pupils. Occasionally, the tasks set are too easy for some pupils, and they finish quickly and do not always have extended tasks to enable them to advance their learning.
- Teachers mark work regularly and reinforce the focus of lessons. However, they do not consistently provide pupils with enough information about how they can improve their work.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. As a result, the pupils feel safe and happy at the school. Individual pupils are able to get personal support if they have worries or are upset.
- Pupils take great pride in their achievements and are determined to succeed. They take care in the presentation of their work and identify personal targets in writing and mathematics. Pupils greatly enjoy embracing new experiences through their participation in clubs and other activities such as the wide variety of trips.
- Pupils are clearly taught how to be resilient and self-confident learners. Pupils told inspectors how this helps them to keep going when they are struggling and when they make mistakes. Pupils, consequently, relish the challenge of harder tasks when they are set and become self-assured in lessons and when holding positions of responsibility.
- Pupils know about different forms of bullying but are adamant that it rarely occurs. They know how to deal with bullying should it occur and are confident that adults respond to any concerns and would help them should an incident arise. Pupils have been very well taught about the need to stay safe when using modern technology and explain practical strategies of how to keep safe when using the internet.
- Pupils enjoy their learning because lessons are usually interesting. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and this helps pupils to feel safe and secure.
- Parents and carers are highly positive about the school's welcoming feel, and its pastoral arrangements for their children. Parents told inspectors that the school is quick to sort out their concerns.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They respond well to instructions from the staff and good manners are encouraged successfully. Instances of serious misbehaviour and of bullying are rare.
- Pupils get on well together and enjoy sharing their ideas in class and show respect towards the values and beliefs of each other. They are respectful and courteous and thoroughly enjoy talking to visitors about their school.
- The school is a calm and purposeful place in which to learn and develop. Pupils respond well to the high expectations for their behaviour and strive to meet the school's values of friendship, trust, forgiveness and justice. Routines are firmly established and pupils adhere to them at all times.
- The vast majority of pupils spoken to by inspectors, and who contributed to the surveys, said they felt safe at the school. Pupils indicated that there was occasionally a small amount of bullying and that on rare occasions a couple of pupils showed extremes of behaviour. However, pupils were keen to highlight that staff dealt with these situations very well.
- School records show that behaviour is usually good. Pupils know and understand the school's policy regarding behaviour and are very clear about what is expected of them. Pupils say that behaviour is good most of the time but on occasions in lessons a few do not behave as expected. Staff manage any poor behaviour well so disruption to lessons is minimal.
- Attendance has improved because of the action taken to reduce persistent absence. Meetings and support for individual parents have led to less absence by their children.

## Outcomes for pupils are good

- There is an improving trend in the achievement of pupils currently within the school, who have all benefited most from recent improvements. For example, the proportion of pupils making expected and more than expected progress is rising.
- Typically, the pupils make good, though not exceptional, progress. They reach broadly average standards by the time that they leave the school.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disabilities achieve well and make progress at rates similar to their classmates. This is because teachers work closely with the staff specifically tasked with supporting more vulnerable pupils to identify specific needs. This helps them to provide the right support in class or provide them with special programmes of work that help them catch up.
- Attainment gaps between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils nationally are closing, particularly by the end of key stage 1. The Year 6 gap had widened to over one year in reading in 2015 but has narrowed this year as progress for all groups of pupils has risen.

- The most able pupils achieve well. Questions posed usually challenge this group of pupils well, particularly at the start of lessons and in small groups. This is because the school generally keeps a close watch on them, reporting to governors on their attainment and progress. In this way, governors play their part in helping to ensure that these pupils achieve well. Despite this there are times when the level of challenge is not high enough.
- The school has identified that outcomes in writing have not improved quickly enough, and has made this a priority. Staff have started to identify ways that they can encourage pupils to write longer pieces, in a range of styles and across different subjects. There is also an increasing focus on the accuracy of the spelling and punctuation used. However, there is more to do to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they can and provide more times when pupils write extended pieces of work.
- Pupils are developing secure skills in reading and mathematics. The improvement of writing skills is a school priority and evidence in books shows that there has been improvement this year due to targeting pupils with weaker skills.
- Pupils leave the school with the knowledge, skills and understanding, as well as the determination, to make a good start at secondary school.

### **Early years provision**

**is good**

- The children make solid gains in their learning, due to the stimulating tasks that they are given and to the fact that they persevere with what they are doing. From being slightly below what is typical for their age on entry to the early years, the proportion of children reaching a good level of development is now above average and this prepares them well for Year 1.
- The early and continuous assessment of pupils' needs means that tasks challenge children well. It also means that effective programmes of support can be swiftly put in place.
- Children in the early years enjoy school. They have very positive attitudes to learning and they behave well. Staff in the early years have built strong relationships with children, who feel very safe and secure in the Reception classes. The environment, both indoors and outside, is bright and attractive and contributes well to children's well-being.
- Children who have special educational needs are quickly identified. Additional support is put in place to help them, and the school works in effective partnership with external agencies to meet their needs. This helps them to develop good skills and to improve their language and communication.
- The achievement of disadvantaged pupils is good. This is because additional funding is used to ensure that any gaps in attainment or cases where progress is slow are quickly picked up by the school and addressed effectively. Children are challenged to make at least good progress from their starting points. Clear criteria are used well to allow children to understand fully what is expected of them. Opportunities are provided for children to reflect on what they have studied to reinforce learning.
- The school provides a good range of resources to support learning. Adults organise well-planned sessions that develop the children's skills and confidence well. Carefully managed activities enable children to explore ideas on their own through indoor and outdoor play.
- Arrangements to keep children safe are well planned and organised. The children quickly learn how to behave in the way that is expected of them and keeps them safe. Staff are visible and vigilant inside the classroom and outside.
- Partnership are effective. Links with parents are well developed and successful in ensuring that there is frequent communication between home and school. Leaders engage well with agencies beyond the school, for example with speech and language specialists, to ensure the well-being and academic progress of children. Leaders gain valuable insights from a wide range of pre-school settings prior to children starting in the Reception classes.
- Strong leadership of the early years focuses continually on improving teaching. If a child's progress slows, then effective action is taken. Strengths of the setting are clearly understood and rigorous action taken to drive up the quality of teaching and outcomes for the children.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	118738
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10012301

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	421
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Richard Webster
<b>Headteacher</b>	Diane Moore
<b>Telephone number</b>	01233 625 531
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.st-marys-ashford.kent.sch.uk">www.st-marys-ashford.kent.sch.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:admin1@st-marys-ashford.kent.sch.uk">admin1@st-marys-ashford.kent.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	8–9 May 2014

## Information about this school

- Ashford St Mary's Church of England Primary School is larger than the average-sized primary school.
- An average proportion of pupils are eligible for additional government funding, known as the pupil premium. The funding is used to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disabilities is lower than average.
- The school runs a breakfast club managed by the school. There is an after-school care provision managed and inspected separately.
- In 2015, the school met the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- Since the previous inspection, the school leadership has changed significantly. The current headteacher was appointed in February 2016.
- The early years provision is full-time.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited 18 part-lessons, four of which were observed jointly with senior leaders. The inspectors visited a range of lessons for short periods, including groups that support the development of pupils' phonics and reading skills.
- Meetings were held with school leaders and five governors, including the chair of the governing body. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from Kent local authority.
- The inspectors spoke informally with pupils in lessons and at various times during each day. The inspectors also spoke formally to a group of pupils during the inspection.
- Questionnaire returns completed by 29 members of staff were taken into consideration.
- The inspectors checked a range of pupils' workbooks and information about pupils' current progress in lessons. Inspectors also reviewed a number of documents, including the school's development plan, attendance records, information relating to the work the school does to keep pupils safe and minutes of governing body meetings.
- Account was taken of the 97 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors also spoke with parents informally at the start of the school day.

## Inspection team

Richard Blackmore, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Lynn Lawrence	Ofsted Inspector
Tracy Good	Ofsted Inspector



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