

St Swithun's VC Lower School

Ivel Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1AX

Inspection dates

19–20 January 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The leadership has maintained the good quality of education since the previous inspection.
- School leaders have sustained a positive ethos in which pupils feel valued, have confidence to achieve and make good academic progress.
- Governors, under the strong leadership of the chair of governors, are well informed about the work of the school. Together with senior leaders, they have had a significant impact on improving the quality of teaching in the school.
- Middle leaders are new to their roles and are not as well established. They have an accurate understanding of their subject areas; however, it is too soon to assess the impact of their work on accelerating pupils' progress.
- Teaching of early reading is highly effective. Children in the Nursery learn their sounds quickly and accurately. The proportion of pupils that achieve the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check is above the national average.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve well. Teachers make good use of assessment information to plan for these pupils' individual needs, so they make good and often rapid progress.
- Governors do not ensure that the good work of the school is communicated as well as it could be. The website does not include all of the information that must be available to parents. This causes some concern for a few parents.
- Children in the early years benefit from learning that is well planned and interesting. As a result, children settle quickly and participate well in their learning activities.
- Leadership of the early years is a strength. Children make good progress in the Nursery class and this continues in Reception. Children are well prepared for Year 1.
- The small numbers of disadvantaged pupils at the school make good progress. This is because leaders carefully monitor each individual's achievement.
- Pupils are safe and well cared for. Leaders make sure that there are effective child protection arrangements in place.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. School leaders prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain and their focus on teaching values to pupils provides a moral framework that is shared by all.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to regularly experience and apply their skills in creative subjects, such as art or music, or in their topic subjects.
- The younger most able pupils are not provided with enough opportunities to excel. In 2016, in key stage 1, the proportion of pupils who reached the higher standard in mathematics was lower than the national average.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership by:
 - providing middle leaders with opportunities to develop their subject areas further and fully contribute to checking the impact of teaching and learning on pupils' progress
 - ensuring that pupils are given regular opportunities to practise their skills and abilities through the wider curriculum
 - ensuring that parents are fully informed about the good work of the school and that the school's website has all of the required information.
- Improve teaching and learning by planning appropriately challenging and interesting activities for the most able pupils from a younger age so that more excel by the end of key stage 1, particularly in mathematics.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher is passionate and ambitious for pupils. She and the recently appointed deputy headteacher are very effective in their roles, and maintain a school community in which pupils feel valued and behave well. School leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and improvement areas in the school. Consequently, the vast majority of pupils are able to make good, and in some cases even better, progress.
- Senior leaders have an accurate view of the quality of teaching in the school. They regularly monitor the impact of teaching on learning and the progress pupils make, quickly tackling any areas of underperformance. Steps are in place to continue to improve teaching further.
- Staff are proud to work at the school and say that they feel supported by school leaders. Newer members of staff commented that they receive strong support and coaching to improve their planning and teaching. Consequently, staff work well together, share their good practice and follow school policies and procedures willingly and well.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. The leadership team and other adults skilfully promote qualities such as friendship and tolerance through the whole-school half-termly values. The many high-quality displays around the school demonstrate pupils' mature reflections. In one display, pupils of all ages have written their aspirations on 'water beads'.
- Leaders have used the additional funds provided to support disadvantaged pupils skilfully and effectively. This year, through recruiting a family support worker, leaders are building effective relationships with families and pupils to raise their attendance in school. Attendance for this group is rising as a result and is currently closer to the national average.
- Leadership of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is highly effective. Pupils' needs are identified early, with relevant support in place for those who require it. Where pupils have an education, health and care plan or statement of special educational needs, leaders ensure high-quality teaching, safety and care. The special educational needs coordinator works effectively with outside agencies. Specialist staff who work with pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder and attend the school's hub (Chestnut class) receive appropriate training and are highly skilled. These pupils make exceptional progress both personally and academically.
- Although leaders use the sports premium well to promote sport and physical education within school and through extra-curricular activities, they have not yet revised or reviewed the spending of the additional funds. Consequently, leaders have not fully communicated the impact of the funding on pupils' progress and development of skills as well as they could.
- Parents are highly positive about the school and the work leaders do to keep their children happy, safe and well cared for. The view of many parents can be summed up in one response to the online 'free text' service: 'my child has made great academic progress, but equally important, she is nurtured and cared for so brilliantly'. Where

concerns regarding homework were made, inspectors found that parents' views were mixed. Leaders carefully evaluate the impact of homework activities for pupils and balance the interests of pupils increasingly well.

- Middle leaders are new to their roles. They fully understand the strengths and areas for improvement in their subject areas and are increasingly involved in monitoring the quality and effectiveness of teaching. Middle leadership is currently more effective in English and mathematics. Leadership of other subjects across the curriculum is still in its infancy and it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this work.
- The curriculum is heavily focused on developing English and mathematics skills. Although the school follows a themed approach to other subject areas, pupils' books demonstrate that they have less time regularly developing and deepening their skills in subjects such as art, music and at times science. School leaders have identified this issue and have firm plans to review the curriculum provision to ensure that pupils have more regular opportunities to practise their skills across the wider curriculum.
- The school brokers the support of a consultant who works for the local authority to assist with leadership development. Staff value the contribution and impact of their external partner.

Governance of the school

- The governing body is effective in its work. Under the guidance of the experienced chair and vice-chair of governors, the governing body carries out its statutory duties well.
- All governors understand their responsibilities with regard to the safeguarding of pupils within the school. They have received appropriate training in child protection and comply with recent legislation to have police checks.
- Governors effectively hold school leaders to account for the achievement of pupils. Through regular visits to the school, governors check the validity of the information they are given. Minutes of meetings show that they precisely challenge and question the work of school leaders.
- Governors ensure that the financial management of the school meets statutory requirements. They are becoming increasingly effective when deciding how to use the additional money provided for disadvantaged pupils. Inspectors found that the website was not fully compliant. In particular, leaders have not published the curriculum information in sufficient detail for each year group, which means that parents are not fully informed of the good work of the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Statutory child protection training is in place. All staff and governors have benefited from recent training and are fully aware of their duties and responsibilities. Staff receive regular updates from school leaders.
- Child protection records are meticulously kept and concerns followed through with other agencies, so that the best outcomes for pupils are achieved. The safeguarding team work regularly together to review their practice and provide quality support. The

approach used by the school is highly effective.

- Governors ensure that the necessary checks are completed when new members of staff are recruited. The records of these checks are in satisfactory order and compliant.
- Most pupils who responded to the pupil questionnaire commented that they feel safe all of the time. Inspectors agree that leaders ensure a calm and safe environment in which to learn.
- Pupils are taught how to stay safe when using the internet. During the inspection, pupils in Years 3 and 4 participated in a theatrical event specifically to promote online safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. This is because teachers focus on the needs and abilities of pupils in their class and have good relationships with their pupils. Inspection evidence, including the school's wide range of assessment records and work in pupils' exercise books, confirms this.
- Teachers use the assessment information they have well to plan learning activities that are interesting and make pupils think deeply. As a result, pupils are attentive and participate well in lessons.
- Teachers receive timely and appropriate training so that their subject knowledge and understanding of the higher demands of the mathematics curriculum are well developed. Consequently, pupils currently in school are making strong progress in mathematics due to the higher expectations and range of activities that meet their needs precisely.
- Additional adults who work with individual pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities skilfully support these pupils so they make strong progress in their learning. Pupils who have an education, health and care plan and those who attend Chestnut class are very well cared for. These adults are skilled and enable these pupils to work independently and within class with others. They make exceptional progress from their starting points.
- The teaching of early reading is a key strength of the school. This has not always been the case. Leaders have changed the approach to the teaching of sounds from Nursery through to key stage 1. This is reaping rewards. Inspectors heard young pupils reading during the inspection. They make good use of the knowledge of sounds to read unfamiliar words proficiently.
- Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy writing. They are given plenty of opportunity to develop their skills. Handwriting and letter formation are skills that pupils are mastering so that more of them are using a cursive script well and efficiently.
- Teachers explain mathematical concepts clearly and accurately. Consequently, pupils understand what they need to do in the lesson and little time is wasted. Pupils focus on their work and want to do well. However, the most able pupils are not provided with frequent timely opportunities to use and apply their skills in different and interesting ways.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are valued and their contributions celebrated. In one class, pupils keenly showed inspectors the stickers they receive from their teacher when they achieve well. They proudly remembered why they had received them too.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well cared for and given every opportunity to participate in lessons. Those pupils who attend Chestnut class are fully integrated into lessons and often work effectively and independently.
- Pupils explained that they have someone to speak to if they are worried. They were sure that an adult would listen and take action. The school council representatives have instigated a worry box for pupils so that even more pupils can be listened to. These representatives sensitively explained how they help and support pupils who have concerns. Pupils in this lower school are developing a mature understanding of emotions and empathy as a result.
- Personal development is not yet outstanding because pupils do not yet have sufficient opportunity to develop their skills in other subjects such as art, music or topic so that they can excel.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Their enthusiasm for learning, together with their positive relationships with each other, ensures that lessons proceed without interruption or distraction. Additional adults support pupils who require additional assistance with behaviour choices well. This results in a calm and purposeful environment in which pupils can thrive.
- Pupils are polite and very proud of their school and their learning. They are pleased to show their work and talk about their lessons. Pupils' conduct around the school is exemplary. Their conduct is similarly impressive even when their usual teacher is not leading the learning. For example, during the inspection, Years 3 and 4 had the opportunity to learn about the effects of internet bullying from a visiting theatre company. Pupils remained respectful and participated appropriately with the visitors.
- Attendance in 2016 was in the lowest 10% for disadvantaged pupils and those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This year, the family worker is building effective relationships with parents and families so that appropriate support is provided. As a result, attendance has risen, especially for this particular group.
- Behaviour at less structured times is energetic for pupils of this age. Since leaders adapted the behaviour policy, pupils now have a visual reminder from the 'growing bubble' so that they can self-regulate their behaviour choices. All pupils spoken to have a strong desire to take the right course of action both in class and outdoors. Consequently, incidents of poor behaviour are rare and pupils say that they are

confident that adults will deal with situations well.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils achieve well. At the end of key stage 1, in 2016, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in each core subject (reading, writing and mathematics) was at least in line with national averages.
- Pupils of all ages read widely and often. Those who read to inspectors demonstrated an enjoyment of reading as well as fluency. Teaching of phonics is strong and well organised across the early years and key stage 1. In 2016, results in the Year 1 phonics screening check rose dramatically as a result. The proportion of pupils who reached the standard expected was significantly above national averages. Inspection evidence shows that pupils receive precise and systematic teaching.
- In lower key stage 2, pupils continue to make strong progress. This is particularly the case in mathematics. From the books seen in Years 3 and 4, pupils are working at age-related expectations and are often provided with work that makes them think hard and grapple with challenging mathematical concepts. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their mathematical learning.
- There are very small proportions of disadvantaged pupils and numbers can fluctuate significantly in each class. Each individual is tracked carefully from their starting points in English and mathematics. Inspection evidence indicates that disadvantaged pupils make at least expected and often better progress from their starting points.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are making good and often better progress in their learning. This is because individual needs are carefully assessed. Leaders ensure that those pupils who have specific barriers to learning are cared for exceptionally well so they make progress at the same rate as others.
- In 2016, the proportion of pupils who reached the higher standard in mathematics by the end of key stage 1 was below that found nationally. Under the previous accountability measure, the achievement of the most able pupils had been at least in line with national expectations. Evidence seen in pupils' mathematics books demonstrates that the most able pupils are not always provided with sufficient opportunity to use and apply their skills so that they can excel from an earlier age.
- In subjects other than English and mathematics, pupils have less opportunity to deepen their understanding and skills so that they can excel. Pupils told inspectors that they would like more regular art lessons. Inspectors agree that the curriculum provision requires review so that pupils are consistently well prepared for each stage of their education across the full range of subjects.

Early years provision

Good

- Children enter the early years with levels of knowledge, language and skills broadly typical for their age. Clear routines are quickly and well established and, as a result, children show a very positive attitude to their learning. The proportion of children who reach a good level of development is increasing over time and in 2016 was above national averages. Current school assessment information, supported by evidence

collected by inspectors, indicates that the proportion is continuing to rise because of the good-quality start they receive. Children are increasingly well prepared for the challenges of Year 1.

- Leadership of the early years is a strength. All adults work effectively together to create a friendly and engaging environment in which learning activities are carefully planned to meet the needs of pupils well. Consequently, children are confident learners who readily explain what they are learning and how well they are doing.
- Children in the Nursery class develop their early reading skills well and precisely. Adults are highly effective role models, ensuring that children learn their sounds and letters accurately and effectively. In one lesson seen, these youngest children confidently demonstrated making sounds such as 'h'. They were then able to explain that 'helicopter' and 'hedgehog' started with the sound. They were delighted with the praise they received from their teacher. From the youngest child, everyone was engaged and keen to show their skills.
- Pupils' achievement by the end of early years is rising and has been for the last three years. This is because the early years leader is passionate and relentless about every child achieving their very best and is very effective in her work. The early years leader is expecting a small number of children to go beyond the expected level in the early years curriculum in 2017.
- Adults keep meticulous records of each child's development across all areas of learning. These records show a wealth of activities. Progress in learning can easily be seen for each individual. Children who have additional needs are quickly identified and support provided.
- Children are well behaved and confident. They listen to instructions and follow them carefully. They persevere with activities and get along very well together. In one lesson, children were following instructions carefully to produce sentences about their alien. The group of children each used sounds well to spell their sentences. One child confidently explained that a sentence had a capital letter and a full stop.
- The outdoor area is well equipped and covers all areas for learning well. When adults are working with children outside, they use questions effectively to promote language and deepen children's understanding further. At times, adults intervene too quickly and this limits the opportunities for the most able children to practise their skills independently. This is particularly true for writing opportunities when playing outside.
- Parents are highly positive about how well school leaders ensure that their children settle well and are happy and safe. Many of the comments on the Parent View free text service demonstrate that parents appreciate the efforts of the school staff to ensure that their children start school well.

School details

Unique reference number	109604
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10023473

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	174
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Diane Osborne
Headteacher	Anita Whitehurst
Telephone number	01767 680692
Website	www.stswithunssandy.co.uk
Email address	schooloffice@stswithuns.cbeds.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	25–26 April 2012

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information on the website about what will be covered in the full curriculum for each year group.
- The school is smaller than the average size nationally for a primary school.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding is below national averages.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with national averages. The number of pupils who have education, health and care plans is above national averages.
- The school provides specialist education for up to eight pupils who have an autistic spectrum disorder.
- The school operates a flexible attendance arrangement in the Nursery.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in all classes and over a range of subjects. Some of these observations were carried out jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders and middle leaders, teachers, governors and groups of pupils. A meeting was also held with an external consultant who works for the local authority.
- Inspectors analysed and evaluated a range of documentation which included information about pupils' attendance, medical records, achievement and behaviour records, school self-evaluation and school improvement planning, safeguarding, the curriculum, governor meetings and the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Inspectors considered the views of 47 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as 20 free text comments. Parents' views were also informally sought on the playground over the course of the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the views of 44 pupils and 21 staff who responded to their online surveys.

Inspection team

Kim Hall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Maher

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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