

St Mark's Church of England Primary School

School Lane, Hadlow Down, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 4HY

Inspection dates

10–11 July 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The two co-headteachers share a deep moral purpose to provide the best possible education for every pupil in this small school. They work extremely effectively together.
- Governors provide a high level of challenge to school leaders. They plan ahead thoughtfully and keep a close watch on the school's finances. Governors' checks on safeguarding are rigorous.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well. They have respectful relationships with each other and with the staff. This is a happy and harmonious school.
- Children get off to a flying start in the early years because of the high-quality provision they receive. Children settle into school quickly and happily.
- The curriculum provides pupils with many opportunities to learn a range of subjects. This is enriched by enjoyable after-school clubs and stimulating visits. However, leaders recognise that further work to develop pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in subjects other than English and mathematics is a top priority.
- Teachers appreciate the many opportunities leaders give them to develop their skills. As a result, teachers have strong subject knowledge. They constantly strive to improve their practice.
- Reading is a strength of the school. The skilled teaching of phonics ensures that pupils are encouraged and supported to read widely. As a result, pupils' outcomes in reading are impressive.
- Recent changes to the teaching of mathematics are beginning to reap benefits. Pupils use a range of calculation skills competently to solve complex problems. A developing range of appealing resources deepens their learning further.
- The most able pupils do not consistently achieve the standards of which they are capable, particularly in writing and mathematics. High expectations and challenge for these pupils are increasingly evident but not yet fully established.
- Parents and carers are extremely positive about the school. They feel their children are safe, well cared for and treated as individuals.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the progress of the most able pupils in mathematics and writing so that more exceed the standards expected for their age.
- Ensure that the whole curriculum successfully develops pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The two co-headteachers provide exceptionally strong and stable leadership. They are unwavering in their determination to ensure that high standards are maintained. Neither are complacent and they work effectively together, united in their shared vision of excellence.
- A strong Christian ethos underpins the school's values. Leaders' tightly held view that St Mark's is a school of 'learners' means that all staff and governors are spurred on by their ambition and determination to provide the best possible learning and personal experiences for the pupils.
- Staff work as a cohesive and happy team where everyone feels valued and involved. Many staff extol the approachability of leaders and say that their views are sought out and 'listened to'. Every member of staff spoken to said that they feel 'tremendously proud to be part of this school'. This contributes to the overall sense of well-being shared across the whole school community.
- Leaders routinely ensure that staff receive appropriate and effective training. They support and encourage staff to think deeply about their practice and provide them with opportunities to read and discuss educational research. Teachers and support staff say that leaders provide 'exceptional' continuing professional development. This empowers staff to actively develop their areas of interest. In turn, this benefits pupils.
- Partnerships that foster collaborative working lie at the heart of the school's success. Relationships between leaders, staff, families and the wider community are strong and mutually beneficial. For example, leaders seek and act upon parental views through the parent forum, local pensioners come into school to learn computing skills, villagers run after-school clubs and pupils get involved in developments and activities in the local area. The astute acquisition and development of a piece of local land, St Mark's Ideal Learning Environment (SMILE), enrich pupils' learning opportunities. The school plays a central role within, and benefits from, The St Mark's Teaching School Alliance, as well as local partnerships with other schools.
- Despite a number of staff changes and circumstances beyond the school's control, leaders have done all they can to ensure that standards remain high and there is consistency of provision for pupils. This commitment to pupils is always at the forefront of all staffing decisions.
- Leaders are adept at seeking out funding from a variety of different sources, including grants for music, health and well-being, as well as heritage funding. This is a commendable part of the school's work. Leaders use this funding wisely, supplementing the rich and varied menu of activities on offer and providing opportunities for pupils, such as art, drama and emotional support, that otherwise might not be available.
- The curriculum is expansive and creative. It is enriched by trips to interesting places and visitors into school. Pupils study artists such as Giacometti, take part in drama productions, have opportunities to sing often and learn a variety of musical instruments. Leaders are passionate that the curriculum offers many opportunities to

enrich pupils' learning and are deeply committed to ensuring that this happens. However, leaders recognise that there is more work to do to further develop pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in some areas of the curriculum. Work to improve this is already planned for next year.

- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders ensure that the curriculum provides extensive coverage of fundamental British values. For example, pupils have opportunities to take part in the school's parliament and study a well-considered personal, social, health and economic programme.
- Leaders make sure that provision for the small number of disadvantaged pupils is of a high standard. Additional funding is used effectively to support these pupils academically and pastorally. Leaders use funding insightfully to support transition in and out of Year 1 and Year 2. This is highly successful, as pupils settle into their year group with ease, meaning that they are ready to learn. Progress for this group of pupils is tracked rigorously and leaders make sure that they receive exactly the support they need. As a result, this group of pupils are making strong progress.
- Leaders ensure that the above-average proportion of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities are cared for well. The school is highly inclusive and this group of pupils are encouraged and supported to take part in all aspects of school life. Leaders make sure that staff receive appropriate training and provide specific interventions to support the learning of individual pupils. Pupils are provided with a range of appropriate resources to help them learn. As a result, most pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders apply the primary sports funding to increase the range of activities and equipment available to pupils. Pupils take part in a range of after-school sports clubs and enjoy the increased number of sporting resources purchased by the school. For example, pupils were observed enjoying basketball and netball during lunchtime. Leaders are reinstating 'the daily mile' to increase pupils' fitness levels.
- The vast majority of parents spoken to were highly positive about the school. They appreciate the efforts of leaders to maintain the school's community feel. Many parents spoke about the school's 'uniqueness' and its 'magical atmosphere'. One parent spoke for many, saying: 'This is a school with a family feel where the children are offered a wide range of interesting opportunities that make their education fun.'
- The local authority has an insightful and accurate understanding of the school. It prudently commissioned a 'leadership transition review' to support the new leadership structure of the school with practical observations and recommendations. As a result, school leaders and governors have the information they need to set the strategic direction of the school.

Governance of the school

- Governors have a precise and accurate understanding of the school. They are passionate and dedicated. They sensibly receive regular training and have the required skill set to carry out their statutory duties well. They work hard to ensure that the school's finances are managed effectively.
- Governors rigorously challenge school leaders. They ask well-informed questions to

highlight areas that could further improve. They regularly probe for information, inviting staff to their meetings to understand better the work that the school does.

- Governors give admirable attention to forward planning and judiciously reflect on ways in which the school can develop further. This is evident in their careful consideration of the school's leadership structures and well-planned improvements.
- Governors' attention to safeguarding is meticulous. They regularly check the school's single central record and make sure that pupils' safety is paramount, for example by making improvements to the school's entrance and further securing access between the playground and the neighbouring church.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff training in safeguarding is frequent and appropriate. Leaders make sure that safeguarding matters are discussed on a weekly basis. Thus, all staff are well informed and share a collective responsibility to keep pupils safe.
- Staff have an in-depth knowledge of their pupils. They are well trained to identify and report any concerns that they may have about pupils' welfare. These are acted upon swiftly, with leaders taking robust action to help pupils and their families when concerns do arise.
- Health and safety checks are undertaken rigorously by leaders and governors. Pupils say they feel safe and know what to do in the event of a fire or a major incident. They appreciate that staff keenly look out for their welfare.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online because e-safety is an integral part of the school's curriculum. Leaders are proactive in ensuring that parents are well informed about how to keep their children safe online. For example, leaders responded to the recent parental e-safety survey by providing workshops and supplementing information on the school website about how to keep children safe. This partnership work is particularly helpful.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Excellent relationships between staff and pupils mean that pupils work hard and want to do well. Pupils become resilient learners and work extremely well together.
- Teachers follow the school's assessment policy accurately and consistently. They benefit from opportunities to check the accuracy of their assessment with other teachers within and beyond the school.
- Effective phonics teaching in the early years and key stage 1 ensures that pupils use their phonics skills confidently to tackle unfamiliar words. As a result, pupils make strong progress in reading.
- The teaching of reading is a strength of the school. Teachers effectively model how to read with expression and skilfully expand pupils' vocabulary. Pupils' understanding of grammar is developed well and their reading books are appropriately matched to their abilities. As a result, pupils enjoy reading and quickly become confident and

enthusiastic readers.

- Pupils have opportunities to write widely and often. They study and learn from high-quality texts and write in a range of styles. For example, pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 wrote a detailed playscript adapted from a well-known story. However, teachers' expectations of pupils' presentation and handwriting skills are not consistent across the school. A small proportion of pupils, including the most able, do not always take enough pride in their work.
- Pupils enjoy mathematics. Leaders have carefully considered how mathematics is taught and staff have received extensive training to ensure that there is a consistent approach across the school. Older pupils spoken to confirm they are often challenged by mathematical problems and these 'allow their brains to grow'. Pupils' attitudes to and confidence in mathematics are rising. However, leaders recognise that pupils continue to have gaps in their mathematical understanding, which means that some pupils, including the most able, do not yet make the progress of which they are capable.
- Teachers provide practical opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills. For example, pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 demonstrated high levels of engagement in a practical outdoor lesson in which they successfully created a maze using turns and direction. As a result, pupils' mathematical understanding deepens and is becoming increasingly secure.
- Teachers actively look for creative approaches to inspire and engage all learners. For example, learning was brought to life in Year 3 and Year 4 by a World Cup film clip to demonstrate the past continuous tense in a grammar activity. As a result, pupils of all abilities were fully engaged in their learning and successfully able to apply this in their writing.
- Sometimes, teachers' expectations of how well pupils can achieve are too variable. Where teachers' aspirations are not high enough, some pupils, including the most able, are not challenged well enough. As a result, some of these pupils do not achieve the highest standards in a range of subjects.
- Teaching assistants are highly effective. They take their responsibilities seriously and leaders make sure that they receive appropriate training so that they can positively influence pupils' learning. They are rightly trusted to teach small groups of pupils, as well as providing high-quality support for individual pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are confident and self-assured. Older pupils take their responsibility to act as 'buddies' for pupils in Reception very seriously. Across year groups, pupils know each other well and show compassion and sensitivity to each other's needs.
- Pupils and families receive an impressive array of support for their well-being. For example, all have weekly access to the highly valued facility of 'talkspace', a place where they can discuss any worries or concerns.

- Pupils and staff enjoy warm relationships. Staff know pupils well, helping to nurture and guide their development. In return, pupils treat staff with the utmost respect and, because of this trusting and caring environment, pupils flourish.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted skilfully across all areas of the curriculum. Pupils have opportunities to learn several foreign languages and consider different cultures and religions. For example, an older pupil has, of his own accord, decided to learn another language so that he is better able to support a new pupil joining the school in September who speaks English as an additional language. The school's links with a school in Africa further develops pupils' understanding of different cultures.
- Teachers encourage pupils to collaborate harmoniously. For example, older pupils receive funding to run a 'snack shack' at breaktime, selling healthy food. This initiative is teaching pupils to work cooperatively, use a spreadsheet and calculate profit and loss, which will help them with life skills as they move into the next phase of their education.
- The school skilfully celebrates each pupil's individuality. In return, this enables pupils to show respect and tolerance to all, appreciating each other's differences. Parents agree and comment that 'The school does not expect everyone to be the same.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' conduct is exceptional. They walk around the school calmly and purposefully. Behaviour at playtimes is positive. Pupils respect and enjoy the new AstroTurf area, the climbing equipment and the picnic benches. At lunchtimes, they take part in physical activities such as football, playing together well and showing politeness and consideration to each other.
- The relatively small number of minor behavioural incidents are monitored rigorously and investigated thoroughly. As younger pupils learn to understand the school's expectations of behaviour, these incidents quickly reduce. Pupils are confident to confide in adults if they have any problems and say that staff are good at resolving any issues should these arise.
- Behaviour in lessons is very positive. Pupils pay attention to their teachers and contribute readily to lessons. They cooperate well together, for example working in groups to make a short film or in pairs to tackle a mathematics challenge. On rare occasions, some pupils can lose focus if the pace of a lesson slows.
- Pupils show excellent manners and greet visitors warmly. Pupils are keen to speak to adults and are confidently able to explain what they are learning.
- Leaders monitor absence closely and work effectively with parents to ensure that the whole school community has high expectations of pupils' attendance. The weekly church celebration assemblies, to which parents are invited, provide a valuable opportunity to celebrate individual and whole-class attendance. As a result of leaders' work, pupils' overall attendance, including pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities, is above the national average and has improved from the same period last year. The number of pupils who are persistently absent remains significantly below the national

average.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The teaching of reading is highly effective and pupils quickly get to grips with the skills needed to read successfully. In 2017, almost all pupils met the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check and every pupil met the expected standard by the end of Year 2.
- Pupils achieve well as they move through key stage 1, following their strong start in the early years. In 2017, the proportions of pupils who achieved the expected standard for their age in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 were above those seen nationally.
- Leaders are resolute in ensuring that outcomes improve, particularly at the end of key stage 2. Unvalidated performance information this year in key stage 2 shows that current pupils' attainment at the expected standard has risen significantly in all areas compared to last year. Additionally, this data indicates that the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard in reading at key stage 2 has risen significantly from 2017. This is because of the strong teaching of reading.
- The most able pupils do not all make the progress of which they are capable. Work in pupils' books shows that some pupils' understanding is not always extended or challenged. Unvalidated performance information this year shows that too few pupils exceed the standards expected for their age in writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- Work in pupils' books shows that standards in subjects other than English and mathematics are mixed. There are some strengths in every year group. However, pupils do not make consistently strong progress in subjects such as art, history, geography and science.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Children get off to a very strong start in the early years. Children begin school with broadly average levels of development. By the end of Reception, a high proportion achieve a good level of development, with many exceeding in areas such as reading, physical development and shape and space. As a result, they are very well prepared to start key stage 1.
- Children make rapid progress because of excellent teaching based on accurate assessment of children's needs. Teachers meticulously plan activities that challenge and interest children. Adults' very skilled questioning means that children have to think deeply about what they are learning. For example, in a science experiment using oil and water, children were asked to predict what they thought would happen to the oil and then explain what changes were taking place.
- Leaders thoughtfully manage transition into school and routines are quickly established. Children understand the school rules. This is exemplified by the use of 'hazard signs' that children use to keep their work safe. Children understand what

these signs they mean and, as a result, they show respect for the work of their peers.

- The addition of the new Reception classroom in 2015 and the stimulating outside area enables children to productively explore learning independently and safely. They play well together, successfully learning how to share and take turns.
- The teaching of early reading skills is highly effective. Teachers deliver daily structured and well-modelled phonics lessons. Children are given opportunities to write and happily have a go at writing words and sentences in their writing books and on whiteboards. Children already able to read fluently are suitably challenged by the appropriate reading material teachers provide.
- Children love learning and happily choose or are guided towards appropriate activities, becoming quickly absorbed in their tasks. For example, children were observed making animals out of clay, balancing water buckets and playing with musical instruments.
- Adults have high expectations for children's behaviour and give close attention to their well-being. Safeguarding procedures are robust. Staff keep a watchful eye on children to ensure that they are kept safe.
- Parents appreciate the high-quality teaching and expert care their children receive in Reception. They are encouraged to be involved in their children's learning and the school provides helpful weekly communications home, such as 'ask about' and 'how to help' tips, as well as useful workshops on phonics. A high and increasing number of parents engage in the school's assessment system that tracks children's progress and development.

School details

Unique reference number	114552
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10046472

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	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	88
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vicky Richards
Co-headteachers	Claire Rivers and Annette Stow
Telephone number	01825 830 375
Website	www.st-marks.e-sussex.sch.uk
Email address	office@st-marks.e-sussex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 June 2009

Information about this school

- St Mark's Church of England Primary School is smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school is the lead school in The St Mark's Teaching School Alliance.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged is below the national average for primary schools.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is above the national average.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed learning in all classes. All observations were undertaken jointly with the co-headteachers.
- The inspector observed a singing assembly.
- The inspector held meetings with the co-headteachers, members of staff and governors.
- The inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector looked at samples of pupils' work and observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school.
- The inspector met with parents and staff during the inspection to gather their views on the school and considered the school's own surveys.
- The inspector spoke to pupils to gather their views and heard them read.
- Documentation was scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation, information on attendance and behaviour, records relating to pupils' safety, minutes of governors' meetings and information on pupils' outcomes.

Inspection team

Frances Nation, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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