

St Helen's Church of England Primary School

Church Street, Cliffe, Rochester ME3 7PU

Inspection dates	25–26 November 2015
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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher provides good and inspiring leadership for the school. A member of staff captured the views of all with the comment, 'she has transformed the culture, ethos, morale and general atmosphere of the school'.
- Despite the turbulence over the past year in leadership and staffing, the school has improved since its previous inspection and is now good.
- New appointments have helped to strengthen teaching, which is now good. Teachers plan lessons that motivate and engage pupils and inspire them to learn. Teachers make sure that pupils know how to improve their work.
- All groups of pupils are now making faster progress from their starting points and achieving well.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning, enjoy coming to school and want to do well.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils are polite and friendly and conduct themselves well in lessons and around the school.
- Pupils feel safe in school and are well looked after by all staff.
- Children get a good start in the early years. They are well taught in a nurturing environment and make good progress.
- Parents are very positive about all that the school offers their children. A parent summed up the views of many with the comment, 'The school is a very caring environment for children to learn. There is a lovely community feel and parents are encouraged to share their views which are acted upon.' Inspectors agree with this view.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always high enough, especially for the most-able pupils, so they do not always make the accelerated progress of which they are capable.
- Progress in all subjects is not yet consistent across Key Stage 2, especially in mathematics.
- Leaders in subjects other than mathematics and English do not yet have sufficient impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils consistently make rapid progress in Key Stage 2 to further improve outcomes, particularly in mathematics.
- Ensure that teachers always have the highest expectations for what pupils, especially the most able, can achieve.
- Strengthen the role of subject leaders so that they have the same impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning as leaders in mathematics and English.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Although only in place for a short amount of time, the headteacher has had a significant and positive impact on building on the strengths of the school and forging further improvement. She provides good leadership and has rapidly gained the confidence and support of pupils, parents and staff.
- One member of staff reflected the views of all those who responded to the questionnaire: 'The arrival of the new headteacher reinvigorated all staff. We are a more cohesive team than ever before. She has a strong vision, which is wholly supported by senior leaders, and an immeasurable drive to succeed. Major change has come and we are all united by a common goal, providing the best education and opportunities for all children, helping them succeed not only academically but emotionally and socially.' The inspection evidence supports these views.
- Rigorous checks on how the school is performing have given senior leaders an accurate picture of what the school is doing well and what needs improving. This information gives a clear steer to the school development plan so that the right priorities are rapidly being addressed.
- While the school was without a permanent headteacher, the governors and the local authority supported the school well. An interim headteacher was appointed and a national leader of education worked with the school. The many staff changes in Years 3 to 6, however, resulted in a dip in progress over the key stage, particularly in mathematics.
- Frequent checks are made on the quality of teaching and where any weaknesses are identified, support is given and improvement is expected. Training for staff has increased and is successfully linked to whole-school priorities as well as meeting the needs of individuals. Teachers who are new to their careers are supported very well. One member of staff commented that 'Staff development and training has been a priority and made all staff feel valued and appreciated.'
- Teachers and teaching assistants are set challenging targets as part of the management of their performance. These targets are expected to be met before promotion or pay rises are considered.
- English and mathematics leaders have a significant and successful role in improving teaching and learning in their subjects. Leadership of other subjects is not as well developed and does not yet have the same impact on improving teaching, learning and progress.
- There is a broad and balanced range of subjects taught with an appropriate emphasis on mathematics and literacy. A range of additional activities including trips, visitors to school and clubs, enriches pupils' learning experiences. These opportunities promote pupils' good personal development, achievement and enjoyment of learning.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is used effectively. As well as providing additional academic support where needed, the funding is used to ensure that disadvantaged pupils take a full part in the life of the school. This ensures that they participate in trips and clubs. Leaders check that the funding is making a difference to pupils. Gaps in achievement between disadvantaged and other pupils are closing.
- The primary physical education and sport funding is used effectively to increase pupils' participation in a range of physical activities through clubs and sports competitions. Sports specialists and coaches work with and enhance the skills of teachers and pupils and improve outcomes. A testament to this is the school's recent bronze award for its participation in sports events.
- British values are promoted well. Tolerance and respect are fostered effectively through the school's values, the subjects taught and collective worship. Pupils understand the need for rules within the school and the wider society. The school parliament takes a leading role in the school and promotes democratic values. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Collective worship and links with the church are used well to promote pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. Pupils learn about different religions and diversity in all its forms. Literature is used effectively, not only to promote reading skills but also to develop understanding and empathy. For example, a Year 6 pupil demonstrated how the book she was reading helped to reinforce understanding of the dangers of getting 'mixed up with the wrong crowd'.
- Parents are very positive about what the school offers their children. One commented, 'The new headteacher is raising the bar and I can see a positive difference in the school's appearance and atmosphere.'
- The local authority has supported the school during the turbulence in leadership and staffing. There is every confidence in the new headteacher to bring about further improvements.

■ The governance of the school

- The review of governance following the previous inspection and the checks on the school's performance by the local authority prompted significant, positive changes to the work of the governing body.
 - Over the past year, the governing body has faced many challenges due to the turbulence in leadership and staffing and has worked hard to successfully protect pupils' learning.
 - Governors have the information and skills to provide support and challenge to school leaders. They have a renewed focus on their strategic work. They have correctly identified the need to increase their role in monitoring and to ensure that succession planning is established.
 - The governing body shares the ambition and aspirations of the headteacher to further improve outcomes for pupils.
 - Governors have a good knowledge of the quality of teaching and make sure that teachers' pay is linked to how well pupils achieve. They understand how the school performs compared to others.
 - Governors ensure that additional funding is used effectively and is making a difference for pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that all staff and governors have up-to-date training and that everyone, including staff new to the school, knows what to do if they have any concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching is good. There is now a permanent team of teachers who work extremely well together to share their strengths and skills. Along with the teaching assistants, they are very supportive of each other and have refreshed the enthusiasm and drive to do the very best for the pupils. One parent wrote, 'St Helen's is a lovely school with amazing teachers. The teaching and non-teaching staff go above and beyond for the children at the school.'
- Teaching has been improving over time with the support of the interim headteacher and effective training for staff. Teaching has been further strengthened this year by new appointments. As a result, pupils are making good progress and learning new things rapidly.
- Teachers plan lessons that have a clear purpose and pupils know how to be successful. There is a good work ethic across the school and pupils have good attitudes to learning and strive to do their best.
- Teachers have good relationships with pupils and so pupils are confident to try things out and have a go. Pupils know their efforts will be valued and teachers will help them if they do not understand.
- Pupils work very well together to share ideas and opinions. They are supportive of each other, willing to help others out and learn from each other.
- While work is usually at the right level for pupils, on a very few occasions expectations are too low, especially for some of the most-able pupils, and so they do not always make the rapid progress of which they are capable.
- Teachers use the school's assessment policy for marking and feedback consistently well. Pupils have time to respond to teachers' helpful points for improvement and this helps them move their learning forward.
- There is an appropriate emphasis on developing pupils' skills in reading, writing and mathematics and leaders have correctly identified the need to provide pupils with more opportunities to develop these skills when working in other subjects.
- Reading is taught well. Pupils' enjoyment of reading is promoted well across the school. Teachers are confident and skilled at teaching phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) and so pupils quickly use these skills to make progress in reading and writing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils want to do well and have good attitudes towards learning, which helps them make good progress. They spoke to inspectors with enthusiasm about their school and their lessons.
- Pupils are polite and friendly and respectful of adults and each other. Almost all pupils who completed the pupil questionnaire agreed that the school encourages them to respect people from other backgrounds and to treat everyone equally.
- Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They know how to stay safe using the internet and social media and say the school helps them to be aware of potential dangers outside of school. All parents who responded to the online questionnaire agree that their children feel safe in school, are happy and well looked after.
- Pupils understand that there are different types of bullying including cyber bullying. They told inspectors that bullying in school is very rare, as it is not tolerated. They are confident, however, that if any problems did occur, teachers would deal with them straight away.
- Pupils enjoy the responsibilities they are given in school and take them seriously, for example running the breaktime tuckshop, which promotes healthy eating.
- Parents and pupils appreciate the breakfast club, which provides a safe and healthy start to the day. One parent commented, 'There are great opportunities for after-school clubs and a brilliant and welcoming breakfast club team.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils and most parents agree that the school ensures pupils are well behaved.
- Good behaviour in lessons ensures that pupils learn well without interruptions or distractions.
- Pupils conduct themselves well around the school and when they are gathered together for collective worship. Behaviour is sometimes exemplary, as seen when the whole school attended the Church during the inspection.
- Pupils play happily together in the playgrounds. Pupils in Key Stage 1 end their playtime and go back into school in a quiet and calm manner. Routines for the end of playtime for pupils in Key Stage 2 are less clear and pupils are not sure what is expected of them. As a result they take a little longer to settle down to their learning. They show responsible attitudes in the lunch hall, which is a good social time for pupils.
- School records confirm that behaviour is good over time and that pupils learn without fear of any type of discrimination.
- Attendance has improved and is in line with the national average. The school actively promotes regular attendance and punctuality and shares weekly attendance figures with parents on the school website.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- In 2015 at the end of Year 6, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected level of attainment in reading, writing and mathematics was above average. Writing was a strength, although pupils' grammar, punctuation and spelling skills were weaker.
- From their starting points at the end of Key Stage 1, pupils made the expected progress by the end of Year 6 in reading and writing, but progress was less rapid in mathematics.
- In 2015 at the end of Year 2, pupils' attainment was broadly average in reading and mathematics and considerably above average in writing. This represents good progress from their starting points.
- With recent improvements in teaching and especially since September, pupils' achievement has improved considerably. The compelling evidence for pupils' good progress is seen in the work in pupils' books, which show good and often rapid progress across all year groups in a range of subjects.
- There are some good examples of challenge in the work for the most-able pupils. For example, the most-able pupils in Year 6 made outstanding progress when tackling work to explore the properties of 3D shapes. On occasion, however, pupils are not presented with the same level of challenge. Leaders have correctly identified that higher expectations need to be more consistent to ensure that the most-able pupils make more rapid progress.
- Disadvantaged pupils attain as well as other pupils in the school because they make similarly good

progress to others. There is still a gap between their attainment and that of other pupils nationally but this gap is closing rapidly.

- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress because they receive effective, well-targeted help. Their needs are accurately identified and appropriate support is provided.
- In 2015 the proportion of pupils who reached the required level in the Year 1 phonics check was broadly average, although it dipped from the previous year. Good, skilled phonics teaching means that current pupils are using phonics skills well to read unfamiliar words and to help with their writing. Reading for enjoyment is promoted well across the school and pupils of different abilities are enthusiastic readers. They can talk about their preferences for different authors and types of books and give carefully considered reasons for their opinions. Pupils spoke about 'getting so into a book that you can't put it down'.
- The impact of good-quality training in grammar, punctuation and spelling and good leadership in mathematics are evident in pupils' increasingly good progress in these areas.

Early years provision

is good

- Children start in the early years with skills and knowledge that are often below those typical for their age, particularly in their reading and writing skills.
- Children make good progress and catch up quickly. By the end of the Reception year in 2015 the proportion of children who reached a good level of development was above the national average. This was a considerable improvement from the previous year. Children did particularly well in their literacy and mathematics development and in developing their speaking and moving and handling skills. Children are well prepared to continue their education in Year 1.
- Leadership is good and the impact is evident in children's improved achievement. Staff work well as a team and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Exciting activities are planned that take the interests of the children into account so they are motivated and engaged in their learning. Reading and writing, including phonics, are taught well and children are given a wealth of opportunities to use their developing skills.
- There are good opportunities for children to learn and play inside and outside the classroom. The Glade, an outdoor resource, provides children with good opportunities to explore the natural environment. They develop their imaginative and creative skills as well as developing enquiring minds and working things out for themselves.
- Children learn to work and play together well. They are caring and supportive of each other. This was seen to good effect in the Glade. Children worked together to make 'tents' and two boys were observed helping each other out without being prompted by adults. One said, 'I'll hold this for you while you go and get a sheet.' His partner replied, 'Okay, so we won't drop it.'
- Children are happy and enjoy all that they do. They quickly develop good levels of confidence and independence. Behaviour is good. Children respond quickly to instructions and learn how to keep themselves safe.
- Staff create a welcoming atmosphere so children start the day happily and settle quickly into the routines. Adults know the children well and there are good procedures to get to know them and their families before they start at school.
- Good relationships with parents ensure that they are well informed about their children's progress and can work in partnership with the school to support their children's learning. One parent wrote, 'Teaching is inventive and parents are really well informed about what the children are learning through partnership sessions, newsletters, weekly blogs and the chance to help in class. My son's self-esteem has rocketed thanks to his teachers noticing his small achievements.'
- Good leadership ensures that adults use assessments well to plan the next steps for children's learning. All groups, including disadvantaged children and disabled children and those who have special educational needs, make similar good progress as adults meet their needs well.

School details

Unique reference number	118641
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10002341

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Powell
Headteacher	Stephanie Jarvis
Telephone number	01634 220246
Website	www.sthelenscofeprimary.co.uk
Email address	office@sthelens.medway.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 October 2015

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-size primary school.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school provides a daily breakfast club.
- From the summer term 2015, the school was led by an interim headteacher. The current substantive headteacher took up her post in September 2015. During the last academic year there were many changes in the teaching staff in Key Stage 2.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 14 lessons. Some of these observations were carried out with the headteacher and one with the special educational needs leader. Inspectors talked to pupils about their work and looked at the work in pupils' books. Inspectors observed pupils at playtimes and lunchtimes and asked them for their views on the school. Inspectors also heard some pupils read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other staff with key leadership responsibilities.
- Discussions were held with governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents including: the school's own check on its performance and the quality of teaching; the school development plan; information on pupils' progress; and records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.
- Inspectors looked at the 42 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, including 13 written comments, and spoke to some parents at the start of the school day. They also looked at 14 responses to the online pupil questionnaire and 16 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Margaret Coussins, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Matthew Brown

Ofsted Inspector

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