

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

St Mary's Road, Swanley, Kent BR8 7BU

Inspection dates

25–26 April 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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school has improved significantly since the last inspection because the headteacher has led a relentless drive to raise standards and accelerate rates of progress for all pupils.
- Senior leaders have high expectations of what all pupils can achieve, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Leaders place the well-being of every pupil at the heart of their work. They leave no stone unturned in ensuring that vulnerable pupils and those at risk of harm are kept safe.
- St Mary's is a highly inclusive school. Leaders take every opportunity to welcome families from all parts of the community, including those with children who have significant needs.
- Standards in reading, writing and mathematics have improved sharply in the last two years, especially at the end of key stage 2. Rates of progress in 2016 in all subjects were well above those seen nationally.
- Teachers plan interesting lessons. They regularly assess pupils' understanding and use this information to inform pupils' next steps. This ensures that pupils build on existing skills, knowledge and understanding and make good progress.
- Pupils show positive attitudes to learning. They are usually keen to join in lessons, work hard and achieve well.
- Pupils take good care of each other. Older pupils are quick to step in and help younger ones without being asked.
- Governors know the school well; they offer effective support and challenge to leaders. They make sure that their actions are clearly focused on improving outcomes for pupils.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years. They make strong progress as a result of good teaching that quickly provides them with the key skills they need to learn well.
- Rates of absence are well above national figures. Leaders are working hard to address the main factors behind this, but their efforts have not seen attendance improve.
- Pupils take some time to adapt to the greater demands of the key stage 1 curriculum. Transition arrangements from Reception into Year 1 do not allow pupils to make the most of the strong start they receive in the early years.
- Standards that pupils achieve in other subjects are not as high as those seen in English and mathematics.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Reduce rates of absence so that all groups of pupils reap the benefits of attending school regularly.
- Improve transition arrangements from Reception into key stage 1, so that pupils are better prepared to build on the strong start that they receive in the early years.
- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that outcomes in all subjects, especially history and geography, are as strong as they are in English and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has created a culture summed up with the words 'no child left behind'. Leaders firmly act on the principle that every pupil is capable of making good progress if they are taught well enough and provided with the right support.
- All staff and governors fully subscribe to this vision, which has had a wholly positive impact on the school and its pupils. Leaders have raised expectations of what pupils can achieve, and pupils' achievement has blossomed as a result.
- These high expectations also extend to pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning.
- Leaders at all levels know the school well, because monitoring and evaluation is regular, thorough and based on a wide range of evidence. Improvement plans are focused on the right things because leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate and recognises the school's weaknesses as well as its strengths.
- Senior leaders place great importance on improving the quality of teaching and building the skills of staff, including teaching assistants. They understand that improving the quality of teaching and learning is essential to raise standards. Performance management is used well to help further improve teaching.
- Middle leaders have a clear, accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their areas of responsibility. Each works hard to drive improvements that are having a positive impact on outcomes for pupils. They check regularly on the effectiveness of their actions and make changes that are needed to improve things further.
- All staff in the school who expressed an opinion feel proud to be a part of the team and enjoy working at St Mary's.
- Staff are creative and willing to take appropriate risks in their teaching, trying new ideas to improve outcomes for pupils. These initiatives are always carefully evaluated to ensure that they are having a positive impact.
- The great majority of parents who expressed an opinion were positive about the school, saying it is a caring place where pupils achieve well. One said: 'My children are very happy at the school, and enjoy going each day, and are making very good progress.' Another was pleased with how well the school has prepared her daughter for secondary school.
- A few parents were less happy and said that they feel uninformed about things that are happening in school.
- The local authority has provided regular, effective support to help the school on its journey of improvement.
- The curriculum is strongly focused on providing pupils with key skills, as seen in pupils' improved outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics. Music and physical education both have a high profile in the school. All pupils have the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument.
- Leaders use pupil premium funding and additional funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities extremely effectively. Leaders understand the

barriers to learning that these pupils face and target money carefully to ensure that it helps pupils to overcome them.

- The primary physical education and sport premium is used effectively to improve teachers' skills and increase pupils' participation in physical activity. There are also ample opportunities for them to represent the school in sports and games.
- Pupils take advantage of the many opportunities for them to learn outside of the school day. In particular, mathematics club, which is held every morning before school, has proved extremely popular. Others include a film club, football club and craft. There is a helpful homework club each week for children in both key stages 1 and 2.
- Homework is used effectively to reinforce pupils' knowledge and skills and is sometimes used to help pupils get ready to learn new things. Pupils value the regular opportunities provided for them to extend their learning at home.
- While good progress is evident in most English, mathematics and science books, the same high standards are not seen across the curriculum, particularly in history and geography. Too often, work is shallow, undemanding and does not help pupils to gain a strong grasp of these subjects.
- The curriculum provides well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They gain an understanding of the main religions of the world in religious education, and benefit from opportunities to enjoy a range of performances, including, for example, a visit to London to see 'The Lion King'.
- Pupils have a strong understanding of fundamental British values and how they apply to their lives. They show respect for the many cultures and traditions reflected in the school's population, and are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Governance of the school

- Governors fully endorse the headteacher's ambition for the school. They provide strong and effective support and challenge to ensure that progress does not falter.
- Raising standards for pupils is the unswerving focus of the governing body. Governors understand the importance of ensuring that disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and other vulnerable groups all make good progress.
- Governors know the school well and have a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. They gain a clear picture of the school, drawing on a variety of sources of information to form their own view. This includes consideration of the headteacher's thorough, detailed and accurate reports, especially with regard to the attainment and progress of groups of pupils.
- Governors have a good understanding of safeguarding and their responsibility to keep pupils safe from harm. They are well informed and receive regular training in all aspects of child protection.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school has a strong culture of safeguarding because staff are vigilant to ensure that all pupils are safe and well cared for. Staff receive regular training in all aspects of safeguarding and child protection.
- All staff place the highest priority in securing the safety and well-being of all their pupils. They understand the signs that might indicate that a pupil is at risk and are swift to report and note these. Staff take care to ensure that even apparently minor issues are recorded, as they might be used later to complete a bigger picture of wider concerns.
- The headteacher and her team leave no stone unturned in following up concerns over pupils, even those who have recently left the school. Leaders are unrelenting in their work with the appropriate agencies to safeguard those who are vulnerable.
- Leaders ensure that the right checks are carried out on adults who work in the school. Policies, procedures and record-keeping arrangements are all fit for purpose and ensure that pupils are kept safe. Records are detailed, thorough and kept securely.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers plan lessons that spark pupils' interest and desire to learn. Great care is taken to ensure that learning is built on a secure assessment of what pupils are already able to do.
- All staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. This includes disadvantaged pupils, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and other groups of pupils at risk of underachieving.
- Pupils say that they learn well because teachers provide good support and show them how to improve their work. Pupils also value the guidance they receive about how to assess their own work and the next steps they need to take in their learning.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge that enables them to help pupils acquire knowledge and build on existing skills. Careful questioning enables staff to assess pupils' understanding and challenge pupils to think more deeply, often demanding more from pupils who offer incomplete answers.
- Staff are constantly vigilant for signs that pupils have not understood something, and act swiftly to provide extra support to secure good progress. As a result, almost no pupils fall behind.
- In mathematics, there are well-planned sequences of learning and good opportunities to consolidate understanding. Most-able pupils have regular opportunities to deepen their understanding by solving tricky problems and using mathematical reasoning.
- The mathematics club, before school, was initially introduced to support older pupils who were struggling with some aspect of mathematics. However, it has become so popular that it has been opened up to pupils from Year 2 upwards. Large numbers of pupils now regularly attend. They told the inspector that they enjoy the club because it helps them to learn and practise mathematics skills.

- Pupils learn phonics well and make good progress because teaching is precise, clear and well planned. Expectations are high and pupils respond well.
- Teaching assistants receive training to enable them to teach phonics accurately and skilfully. Some have developed particular expertise in this area and are used to support and train other staff.
- The school places a high priority on nurturing pupils' love of reading. Pupils read widely and often. They develop a real enjoyment of books and stories and are able to discuss their favourite books and authors.
- Pupils make good progress in writing because they are taught well. They benefit from high-quality texts that fuel their interest and present them with opportunities for using exciting, adventurous vocabulary. This particularly comes to fruition in Years 5 and 6, but is evident throughout the school.
- English grammar is taught well, enabling pupils to understand, explain and use this correctly in their writing. Inspectors saw this in a lesson where older pupils were able to discuss the difference between verbs in the past, perfect, and present perfect tenses, in a confident, assured manner.
- A number of younger pupils in key stage 1 are overly dependent on adults when writing. They have lost some of the independence they gained while in Reception.
- Science is taught well and pupils are given regular opportunities to investigate, make predictions and test these out. Consequently, pupils learn as they progress, and are able to make generalisations based on their results.
- Most books are neatly presented because pupils take pride in their work. However, in one or two classes there is inconsistency in presentation and spellings. At times, pupils are not held to account for untidiness or careless errors and, when this happens, progress is less strong.

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 confident, self-assured and take pride in their achievements. As pupils get older, they willingly embrace the many opportunities on offer to take responsibility. They wear their badges of office with great pride and eagerly explain what each role involves.
- Staff encourage pupils to become active, enthusiastic learners and share their love of learning with others. An inspector observed an assembly where the headteacher was awarding badges to pupils who had applied to be learning mentors. Their letters of application showed that pupils had a clear understanding of how to help others, without simply providing the right answer.
- Pupils are kind and show respect, consideration and acceptance towards each other and the diverse communities that they represent. After a meeting that an inspector held with a group of pupils, the older ones spontaneously offered to help the younger ones back to class.

- Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of bullying. They say that bullying is rare, but that staff quickly deal with it when it does happen. Most parents agree with this view. However, one or two parents who expressed an opinion felt that some bullying is allowed to carry on. Inspectors found no evidence to support this.
- Teachers make sure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe. Pupils are taught about road safety and the dangers that strangers might pose. They learn how to swim so that they stay safe in water.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe online. They know to use child-friendly search engines and how to protect their identity online. Pupils know what to do if they come across something online that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils usually behave well in lessons and have positive attitudes to learning. They are keen to join in, work hard and achieve well. Pupils respond well to teachers and teaching assistants because relationships between pupils and adults are based on mutual respect.
- Pupils not only show respect to teachers, but also to their classmates. Pupils are confident to share their ideas because they know that others will listen politely and in turn offer their own views about what has been said. Children in the Nursery cooperate well, play happily and take turns.
- Staff are well trained so that breaktimes and lunchtimes are happy and safe. Pupils say that the playground is a friendly place to be most of the time. Just occasionally, arguments happen, but staff swiftly intervene so that incidents are not allowed to escalate.
- One or two pupils' behaviour in some lessons can be lively. However, their behaviour is well managed by staff, who know how to help these pupils to stay focused on their learning.
- Leaders use fixed-term exclusions sparingly but effectively. Only a very small number of pupils have been excluded this year and nobody has been excluded more than once.
- Levels of absence have been high in the last two years. Leaders have identified the main group of pupils who are missing out on school, and they are constantly trying new ideas to encourage regular attendance. The school works closely with community leaders to reinforce the benefits of being in school every day and improve attendance. Leaders' efforts have not yet shown measurable results in raising attendance for this vulnerable group.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' outcomes are good. Leaders have focused clearly on ensuring that all pupils make equally good progress from their differing starting points.

- Rates of progress and levels of attainment of pupils at the end of key stage 2 have increased rapidly since the last inspection. In 2016, pupils' progress in reading, writing and mathematics was significantly above national figures. All pupils achieved the expected standard in reading. Proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard in writing and mathematics were well above those seen nationally.
- Outcomes at the end of key stage 1 in 2016 were in line with national figures for writing and mathematics, but were lower for reading.
- Leaders have rightly focused on ensuring that pupils develop good phonics skills to help them become good readers. Results in the Year 1 phonics screening check have improved steadily in recent years and in 2016 were in line with the national average.
- In 2016, the proportion of children in the early years achieving a good level of development was above national figures. The proportion of disadvantaged children achieving this standard has increased consistently in recent years and was higher than for other children nationally last year.
- Standards across the school continue to improve, especially for those pupils in Years 5 and 6. Evidence seen during the inspection points to pupils from all starting points in all year groups making good progress as a result of strong teaching and high expectations from staff.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress because leaders and teachers have monitored their progress thoroughly. Where pupils have started to fall behind, leaders have intervened swiftly to ensure that they catch up.
- Leaders have high expectations of what pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities can achieve. There is a clear expectation that almost all of these pupils will catch up with their classmates if they have the right level of support to help them. Most of these pupils are making strong progress and differences are diminishing.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, make good progress, especially in key stage 2. In mathematics, there are regular opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding and sharpen their skills with problems and activities that require them to reason mathematically.
- Pupils' progress across key stage 1 is not as strong as in key stage 2. Transition arrangements from Reception into Year 1 do not prepare children well enough for the greater demands of the national curriculum, and their progress initially slows as a result.
- Standards in other subjects are not as high as those in English and mathematics. There is evidence that attainment in science is improving, but this is not the case in history and geography, where coverage lacks depth and rigour.

Early years provision

Good

- A significant proportion of children join the Nursery with skills well below those typical for their age. They get off to a flying start, because staff are skilled at developing play and young children's use of language. Staff ask good questions, provide a running

commentary to children's play and seize every opportunity to develop children's learning further.

- Right from the start, children are taught to cooperate, take turns and show respect and kindness to adults and children alike. This creates a happy, harmonious environment where children flourish.
- Adults model speech and language carefully and accurately. This helps children to overcome weaknesses in their speech and language, and supports their good progress.
- The early years classrooms are carefully organised to encourage children's independence. Adults use the engaging environment and wide range of resources to stimulate children's interests and spark their curiosity. The outside environment also provides well for all areas of children's learning.
- Topics are well planned in both classes to cater for the needs of all children. Boys in particular are achieving well, and disadvantaged children achieve as well as other children nationally.
- Beginning in the Nursery, children are taught the sounds that letters make well, together with the names of each letter. Inspectors saw very young children writing simple words accurately and having a good try at writing longer ones.
- Parents speak highly of the early years provision. They value the information and communication they receive about their children and the way that it enables them to participate in their children's learning.
- 'Marvellous me' books in the early years provide regular updates for parents about their child's progress and contain specific next steps that children need to take in all seven areas of learning.
- Safeguarding is effective and all statutory requirements are met.
- Significant numbers of children currently in Reception are still at an early stage of writing. The good teaching of phonics and communication support children to make rapid progress.
- Transition arrangements from Nursery into Reception are almost seamless because children from both classes play and learn together, especially outdoors. However, transition arrangements to key stage 1 do not support children readily to build on the good start they receive in the early years.

School details

Unique reference number	118754
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10032854

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Kerry Graver
Headteacher	Amanda McGarrigle
Telephone number	01322 665212
Website	www.st-marys-swanley.kent.sch.uk
Email address	headteacher@st-marys-swanley.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 April 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- St Mary's Church of England School is an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- Pupils come from a range of ethnic groups, with the largest groups being pupils from an African background and pupils from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to the national average.

- The school provides a Nursery class, which children attend part time, either in the morning or the afternoon.
- The school met the government's floor standards for attainment and progress in 2016.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in all classes; some were joint observations with either the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- A meeting was held with a group of pupils to discuss their learning and views about the school.
- An inspector listened to pupils read in Years 2 and 6 and discussed their reading with them.
- The inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, middle leaders and seven governors, including the chair of the governing body. An inspector also met with a group of teachers and teaching assistants. A telephone conversation was held with a local authority representative and a representative of the local diocese.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and considered a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness and the school's improvement plan; minutes of governors' meetings; checks on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment; information about pupils' progress; attendance and behaviour records; and safeguarding arrangements.
- The inspectors scrutinised pupils' work across the curriculum to assess the quality of their learning and the progress they have made.
- The inspectors took account of the eight responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, inspectors spoke to some parents in the playground at the start of each school day. The inspectors also considered the 12 questionnaires completed by staff.

Inspection team

Bruce Waelend, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Peter Wibroe

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