

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Junior School

St Mary's Way, Baldock, Hertfordshire SG7 6HY

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| Inspection dates | 11–12 May 2016 |
| 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 |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and other leaders have secured good improvements in all aspects of the school's work since the previous inspection.
- The governing body knows the school well and provides good support and challenge.
- Pupils' attainment is above average in English and mathematics, reflecting good progress for all groups, including the most able, over time.
- Pupils are taught well and learn new skills quickly. Teachers make work engaging. They help pupils to develop a love of learning.
- Pupils develop good skills in music, French and physical education and enjoy working with specialist teachers in these subjects.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. They are proud to be part of the school and are keen to do well. They feel safe because adults take good care of them.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are extremely positive. Pupils learn important values such as tolerance, respect and kindness.
- Activities outside lessons such as clubs, visits and visitors provide pupils with many memorable experiences and help to bring learning alive.
- The school has a highly productive partnership with parents. They are extremely supportive of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Leaders' monitoring is not focused sharply enough on checking that all initiatives are having the desired effect and are being applied consistently.
- The school's information on pupils' attainment does not give a clear picture of the progress of different groups.
- Teachers are sometimes too slow in changing pupils' work quickly enough for them when they find it either too easy or too hard.
- Pupils do not always take enough care with the presentation of their work.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen further the impact of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that monitoring by leaders at all levels focuses more closely on checking that all initiatives are having the desired impact and are being applied consistently across the school
 - ensuring that information on pupils' learning gives a clearer and more accurate picture of their progress over time.
- Make sure that teachers adapt work more quickly when it is too hard or too easy for pupils.
- Help pupils understand the importance of always producing their best work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders have secured good improvement in the work of the school since the previous inspection. Under the clear guidance of the headteacher, leaders have improved outcomes for pupils while maintaining strengths in the way that the school cares for and nurtures pupils.
- Senior leaders, with good support from the local authority, have established an increasingly aspirational culture among staff and pupils. This is reflected in the current focus on securing further improvement.
- Leaders have successfully improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Their checking of teaching is accurate. They use this information well to set teachers targets for improvement and to identify what sort of support they need. The training of staff has helped to improve skills. For example, extensive training for all staff, including teaching assistants, has helped to improve confidence in teaching grammar.
- The role of middle leaders, such as those in charge of subjects, has been greatly extended over the last two years. Subject leaders in English and mathematics are particularly strong role models in their own practice and they play a good part in ensuring that outcomes for pupils continue to improve. They have a clear understanding of the main priorities because they are able to check both pupils' progress and the quality of teaching.
- Leaders have a detailed programme for checking the work of the school but this focuses too much on the 'big picture' rather than concentrating more sharply on checking that all initiatives are having the desired effect and are being applied consistently. For example, although there is good support for disadvantaged pupils, which has a positive impact on both their social and academic development, leaders do not check with enough rigour the different aspects of spending to ensure that all the support is equally valuable.
- The school has a wealth of information on pupils' progress but it is not helpful in identifying where additional support is needed. The information does not always give a clear and accurate picture of pupils' progress over time, making it difficult to respond quickly when pupils are in danger of falling behind.
- Leaders ensure that sports funding to develop pupils' ability and participation in physical education is having a good effect. Specialist sports coaches provide good support to teachers, increasing their skills and confidence in the teaching of physical education. Pupils greatly enjoy a wide range of sports clubs and revel in their successes in competitions. For example, they are extremely proud that both the boys' and girls' football teams won their respective leagues.
- The curriculum meets statutory requirements. It helps pupils make good progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills, and provides them with many memorable experiences outside lessons. There is a wide range of after-school activities, some of which, such as chess and drama clubs, have been set up by the pupils. Visits are greatly enjoyed by pupils and contribute well to their learning by bringing subjects alive. For example, Year 3 pupils produced high-quality writing after a visit to a Celtic village.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and understanding of British values, are threaded throughout all activities and supported extremely well. Pupils learn about different values such as 'peace' each term. Pupils have a good understanding of democracy through the process of voting members onto the school council. Visits, including to places of worship, help pupils to learn about life beyond Baldock and prepare them well for life in modern Britain.
- The school has a very strong partnership with parents. They support the school well and most are very happy with all aspects of its work. They typically make comments such as, 'The staff are supportive, accessible to parents and treat every child as an individual', and, 'St Mary's is a lovely school that promotes values of respect and care for each other'.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body provides good challenge and support to other school leaders. Governors have played a good part in the many improvements since the previous inspection. They have increased greatly their involvement in checking all aspects of the school's work. They ask senior leaders challenging questions to make sure they understand how well the school is doing and how the quality of teaching is being improved.
 - Governors ensure that performance management arrangements set challenging targets for teachers and are helping to improve teaching.
 - The governing body reviews its performance regularly so that governors can identify what they need to do better. For example, they have rightly identified that they do not look in enough detail at the use of the pupil premium to be sure that all aspects of spending are proving beneficial to disadvantaged pupils.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. School leaders, including governors, are vigilant in ensuring that all staff undertake the appropriate safeguarding training. The school works closely with a wide variety of external agencies, and parents, to ensure that pupils are safe. School leaders understand the need to protect pupils from extremist views and radicalisation. They have undergone the necessary training to fulfil their roles in this area of their work.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. Members of staff get on well with pupils. They make learning fun and ensure that pupils enjoy their work. This helps pupils to develop positive attitudes towards learning and to work without fear of failure. As one pupil said, 'Sometimes it is good to go wrong because that is how you learn new things'.
- Teachers have good expectations of pupils' behaviour and they apply school rules consistently. They use their good subject knowledge, especially in English and mathematics, to explain new concepts clearly so that pupils can quickly understand them. Teachers expect pupils to work hard, although they sometimes accept work from pupils that is not presented as well as it could be.
- All teachers are thorough at checking how well pupils are doing. Teachers often use pupils' responses as teaching points to correct errors. This means that most of the time work is adapted well to meet pupils' different needs and to provide the right level of challenge for all pupils, including the most able. However, teachers do not always adapt work quickly enough if pupils are finding it too difficult or too easy. When this happens, time is wasted and learning does not move on quickly enough.
- Teachers make good use of feedback, such as the marking of work or the setting of targets, to help pupils develop a secure understanding of how to improve. Older pupils, in particular, are very clear about what they already do well and how they can improve their work.
- Specialist teachers in subjects such as music, physical education and French have a very positive effect on learning. Skilled teaching assistants also play a key part in pupils' good progress. They are well trained and work extremely closely with teachers to plan work and to assess pupils' learning. Their support is particularly helpful in ensuring that pupils with special educational needs or disability make good progress.
- Almost all parents are pleased with the quality of teaching in the school. As one commented, 'The teachers are genuinely interested in the progress and well-being of the pupils'. Homework helps to extend pupils' learning. Pupils enjoy the homework club and say it helps them to improve. They take part especially keenly in 'informal' homework such as completing the 'function machine' that teachers regularly set.

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 have good attitudes towards learning. They are unfailingly polite and friendly with each other, and with adults and visitors in school. When working or playing, they cooperate very sensibly and take good care of each other.
- Parents are very confident that their children are kept safe. Pupils agree that they feel safe at school. They report that problems are usually sorted out very quickly and that if they have a worry, there is always someone to talk to.
- Pupils say that there is a little bullying but staff are quick to resolve issues when they occur. They understand that bullying can take many forms, and know what to do if they encounter cyber-bullying when using social media. Activities such as Bikeability help pupils to develop the skills needed to stay safe outside school.
- Pupils keenly take responsibility through the school council and 'pupil voice' meetings. They use these opportunities well to discuss a range of issues. For example, pupils showed a good awareness of environmental issues as they discussed the overuse of paper towels in the school at a pupil voice meeting.
- Pupils are proud of their school and try hard most of the time, although they are not always careful about making sure that their work is as neat as it could be.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Parents and pupils agree that behaviour is good most of the time. Pupils are polite and courteous, and the school is a calm and orderly place. Pupils feel that behaviour has improved since the previous inspection because they are clearer about the school's rewards and sanctions. They enjoy being given responsibility for improving behaviour. For example, pupils very happily celebrate the good behaviour of others by nominating them as 'playground heroes'.
- Playtimes are enjoyable occasions. The playground is well resourced and pupils have plenty to do. Pupils clearly follow the rules about where they are allowed to go and they respect the invisible boundary on the field between the junior and infant schools. They take good care of the delightful school grounds. They do their best to keep them tidy and to ensure that they are graffiti free.
- Pupils are eager and keen to work in lessons. They respond quickly to adults' instructions and learn to persevere when faced with challenges, often choosing the most demanding work when given a choice. Occasionally, pupils lose focus and concentration. This happens most frequently when they have to sit listening to the teacher for too long or when moving between tasks.
- Rates of attendance are improving and are broadly average in the current year. The school is doing all it can to improve the attendance of the small number of pupils who still miss school too frequently, or do not arrive punctually, by working closely with parents and external agencies.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils' progress has improved since the previous inspection. Attainment is above average in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6, reflecting good progress from their starting points in Year 3.
- Pupils' progress is especially strong in writing. Pupils write purposefully in a range of subjects. This helps them to practise and reinforce skills and to become confident writers. In their writing, pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the rules of grammar, and they usually spell and punctuate accurately, using interesting and imaginative vocabulary.
- Pupils read skilfully from a wide range of texts. They thoroughly enjoy reading, expressing strong preferences for particular authors or genres. Most pupils are able to read out unknown words using their knowledge of phonics, although a few less able pupils find this more difficult, making reading less enjoyable for them.
- In mathematics, younger pupils confidently add and subtract using different strategies as needed by the work. As they get older, pupils carry out increasingly complex calculations and use this knowledge well to solve problems.
- The school ensures that all groups of pupils achieve equally well over time. Just occasionally, however, pupils' progress slows when work is too hard or easy for them and their teacher does not spot this quickly enough. Nonetheless, the most able make good progress because they are challenged well most of the time. As a result, more pupils are working beyond the expected levels for their age than in the past, and in national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2015, the proportion reaching the higher levels, Level 5 or 6, was above average in all aspects of English and in mathematics.
- Disadvantaged pupils make the same good or better progress as others across the school. This helps to close the attainment gap between their attainment and that of others in the school and nationally.
- Pupils with special educational needs or disability make good progress from their starting points because of the good support they receive. Frequent checks on their progress highlight any gaps in their learning, and additional support is arranged where needed.
- As well as making good progress in English and mathematics, pupils are beginning to achieve well in other subjects. Pupils' books show that they make good progress in science, history and geography. They develop a wide range of skills and apply them well, for example, when carrying out science investigations or learning about their local community. Good teaching in music, physical education and French ensures that pupils improve their skills quickly in these subjects as well.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 117385 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10011804 |

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

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| Type of school | Junior |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 7–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 239 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Rosemary Charsley |
| Headteacher | Patricia Jenkins |
| Telephone number | 01462 892156 |
| Website | www.st-marysjm-baldock.herts.sch.uk |
| Email address | admin@st-marysjm-baldock.herts.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 18–19 March 2014 |

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized junior school with eight single-age classes.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs or disability is broadly average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided to give extra support to pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics in Year 6.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed pupils' learning in 19 lessons, over half of which were observed jointly with the headteacher or an assistant headteacher. In addition, inspectors made some short visits to observe learning at other times.
- Discussions were held with pupils, staff, a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body.
- The inspectors took account of the views of 44 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View. Inspectors also talked with parents during the inspection.
- The inspectors heard pupils read and looked at a number of documents, including: the school's own information about pupils' learning and progress; planning and monitoring documents; the school development plan; records relating to behaviour and attendance; safeguarding information; and health and safety documentation.
- The inspectors analysed responses to inspection questionnaires from 15 members of staff.

Inspection team

Mike Capper, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Susan Watts

Ofsted Inspector

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