

St Mark's CofE Primary School

Brantridge Lane, Staplefield, West Sussex, RH17 6EN

Inspection dates

4–5 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires Improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- This is a happy, caring and safe learning environment. Pupils are respected and are proud to be at St Mark's. Relationships are strong, pupils behave well and they have positive attitudes to learning.
- Leaders and governors have successfully improved the school's effectiveness. The headteacher and staff have taken effective action to tackle the legacy of pupils' underachievement and weaker teaching.
- Pupils' achievement in reading, writing and mathematics is good. They make good progress as they move up through the school because teaching is typically consistently good.
- Good support ensures that pupils who have special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils achieve well.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is good because learning is fun and exciting and children get off to a good start.
- Teaching, leadership and management are good and meet children's learning and their social and emotional needs effectively.
- The rich range of activities provides exciting new learning experiences.
- Governors challenge leaders well to ensure pupils make good progress. Parents are very supportive of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers do not always ensure that pupils who find learning easy are set harder work.
- The youngest pupils through to Year 2 have too few opportunities to test out their basic mathematics skills in a variety of ways.
- Pupils do not always read good quality books or other texts during reading sessions. Opportunities are sometimes missed to question pupils more deeply about their understanding of what they read.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed five lessons and parts of four lessons across a range of subjects. Most were observed with the headteacher.
- The inspector spoke with pupils during lessons and break times, and formally with a group of pupils to find out their views about their school. The inspector listened to a few pupils read.
- The inspector held meetings with the senior leadership team, subject leaders, members of the governing body and with a representative of the local authority.
- There were 33 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online survey of parents. The inspector considered these and, during the inspection, also spoke to a number of parents before and after school. The inspector took account of the views of staff in 17 questionnaires.
- The inspector looked at a wide range of documentation, including information on pupils' attainment and progress, samples of pupils' work, the school's improvement planning, minutes of the governing body meetings, the school's policies relating to safeguarding pupils, and records relating to behaviour, safety and attendance.

Inspection team

Sheila Browning, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mark's is much smaller than the average-sized primary school.
- Most pupils are taught in mixed-year classes apart from Year 2. The Early Years Foundation Stage consists of a mixed year Reception and Year 1 class. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage attend full time.
- The vast majority of pupils come from a White British background. A small number are from ethnic minorities. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- Six pupils have special educational needs and are supported at school action. This is lower than average. Five pupils are supported at school action plus, or have a statement of special educational needs. This is also lower than average. The proportion varies between classes.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for extra government funding known as the pupil premium is low. This is funding provided to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority. In this school, six pupils are eligible.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school is a member of a local network of schools that provides enrichment, sporting activities and competitions.
- The school works with several other schools and the local authority to share expertise, training and resources.
- Since the last inspection, there has been a 50 per cent turnover of teaching staff, added to which there has been some prolonged and some unplanned staff absence in different year groups.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement to the highest levels by:
 - making sure that all pupils are always challenged to the full so that more of them reach the higher levels of achievement
 - providing more opportunities for Reception children through to pupils in Year 2 to test out their mathematical problem-solving skills in a wider variety of ways
 - encouraging all pupils to read good quality texts and question them more deeply for understanding of the text.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher consistently communicates high expectations. She is well supported by the assistant headteacher, middle leaders and governors. Staff have a shared vision, values and sense of purpose and say they feel supported and valued. The school's own view of its performance is accurate and the priorities for school development are the right ones.
- Effective leadership and management, and the robust checks on pupils' progress, have been key to the improvements in teaching. This is shown by the pupils' typically good progress made over time from their starting points. Despite this, the school continues to work hard to remove the legacy of pupils' underachievement. Previous weak teaching and significant teacher absence affected the continuity of pupils' learning, especially in early Key Stage 2. Leaders are increasingly ensuring that most children make the progress they should. The local authority has provided valuable support for the school since the last inspection, in the form of external expertise, training and guidance.
- There are good opportunities for teachers to plan together, share ideas and to learn from each other. The cohesive nature of the school means that all teachers share leadership of the subject areas. The leaders analyse half-termly pupil progress information and hold regular pupil progress meetings with class teachers to check pupils' achievement. Targets for what pupils are expected to learn are set for individual pupils, and teachers understand that good progress is expected to close any gaps. Leaders are very focused on checking the quality of teaching in the school. However, they do not ensure that all teachers check that those who find learning easy are consistently and sufficiently challenged.
- Leaders have a sharp understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Although staffing consistency has remained a challenge, leaders have not shied from tackling previous inadequate teaching. Where necessary, other teachers have stepped up to plug gaps when long-term sickness, repeated short-term absences or teachers leaving before a replacement could be found have occurred.
- The school has just started to work with local schools and the local authority to explore different assessment approaches following the removal of National Curriculum levels. Leaders have also reviewed the curriculum to ensure it follows national guidelines. The curriculum covers a range of subjects, with some exciting opportunities for pupils to use their reading, writing and most mathematical skills in a wide range of contexts, including through themed learning journal topics. These provide good opportunities for pupils' academic, technical, creative and sporting development. Visits and visitors further broaden pupils' views and understanding and this helps prepare them for life in modern Britain.
- While the focus in mathematics from early years through lower Key Stage 2 is rightly on securing basic skills, there are too few opportunities for pupils to apply new knowledge in practical ways in any depth.
- Leaders promote equal opportunities and any discrimination is not tolerated. For example, any child at risk of not doing as well is quickly identified and supported. The school has clear procedures to check that pupil premium funding is used effectively to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Last year, funding was spent on mathematics support, tuition and a family worker to support pupils' social and emotional needs. The impact of these initiatives has seen disadvantaged pupils achieve well and make better progress in Key Stage 2 than their classmates in English and mathematics.
- The school works well in partnership with other organisations. It is part of a local group of schools that enables shared access to expertise, resources and training, from examining pupils' work to sourcing funding. A primary learning network provides enrichment and sporting activities for pupils. Good use has been made of primary school sport funding to improve teachers' skills and to provide more opportunities for a greater number of pupils to take part in sports. As part of a mid-Sussex group, pupils take part in inter-school sports events, school Olympics, football and netball leagues. Many pupils enjoy these activities and are aware of the importance of sports and leading safe and healthy lifestyles.
- Parents are encouraged to be involved in the school and can join the Friends of St Mark's. Regular parent surveys are undertaken, their opinions are sought and are acted upon where possible. Parents are kept well-informed, through newsletters and parent-mail about events and matters from explaining the curriculum to Sex Education and relationship meetings. Termly meetings and reports ensure parents have information about their child's progress. Parents told the inspector that they found the school website really informative especially the topic overview. While most responses to Parent View were rightly strongly positive about the school's work, a small minority expressed concern about their child's progress.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are promoted strongly in all subjects and are further strengthened through the strong partnership with St Mark's Church. Consequently, pupils show fairness and consideration for each other and are well behaved. Pupils enjoy their responsibilities; Year 6 are proud to be peer mediators, 'office angels', house captains and members of the school and eco-councils.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governors are determined to 'work together with staff' to become an outstanding school. They effectively pool their considerable expertise and skills to support the school. The school recently purchased an adjacent woodland. The school community cleared the pathways and developed the grounds so that children can enjoy a 'Forest School' experience (Forest School is where pupils' learning is taught outside the classroom). Governors took the decision to finance a Forest School leader for this purpose. Governor committees monitor the school budget and ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet requirements. Governors know the quality of teaching and are familiar with information on the school's performance. They understand that pupils' achievement and pay increases are closely related and they monitor this link robustly. They check that funding leads to the effective deployment of staff and resources, and ensure that funding for disadvantaged pupils and sports is used properly.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are friendly, polite and very welcoming. Pupils come to school early with the right equipment, are eager to answer questions, work well together and show self-reliance. Pupils' work is neat; their learning journals especially show the pride they take in presentation and the overall effort that they make. Very occasionally in books, pupils have not responded to teachers' marking or have unexplained gaps in their work. Pupils are quick to say how much they enjoy their learning and attending all the clubs that keep them interested and enable them to be successful and gain in confidence.
- Relationships are a strength. Pupils' above average attendance reflects their good attitudes to learning. This is a result of careful monitoring and good communications with parents so that very few pupils miss school unnecessarily. There have been no fixed term exclusions.
- Bullying is rare and dealt with most effectively if it does occur. Pupils, parents and staff share this view. Pupils have a good awareness of the different forms of bullying including racist behaviour. Pupils' contribution to the school's development is a strength and governors survey pupils' views. As a result, pupils make a strong contribution to the caring and inclusive atmosphere of the school. Pupils fundraise and are involved in decision-making activities, whether suggesting a rota for the trim trail use or resolving any playground 'niggles'. Pupils told the inspector that they enjoyed their various responsibilities in school.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The site is secure. Procedures for vetting staff are rigorous and robust risk assessments are in place. All staff have appropriate safeguarding training. Pupils have a good awareness and understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including the safe use of the internet and computing technologies.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The leaders' concerted effort to improve teaching and overcome past staffing difficulties has resulted in a very unified group of teachers focused on providing the best for their children. Teaching typically is good and, as a result, pupils make better progress than had been the case. Teachers have high expectations for most pupils and good subject knowledge. This helps deepen most pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teaching caters well for mixed ages, particularly early years. Most teachers use questioning to check on pupils' understanding and reshape tasks and explanations. This ensures pupils can learn effectively and develop a range of skills across the curriculum.
- Teachers now have more accurate and easily accessible information on pupils' progress which supports pupils' learning and progress. However, at times the most able are not always challenged to achieve their very best.
- Pupils' work shows that marking is effective and gives clear and useful feedback, so that pupils know what to do next to improve. Pupils, especially the older ones, reflect on and respond to teachers' comments. They told the inspector that they found this really helpful.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, including social and emotional needs, are well supported, whether in-class, in small additional groups or in one-to-one support sessions. The few pupils who speak English as an additional language also receive similar support. The special educational needs coordinator has introduced a range of good support programmes. These are carefully checked and evaluated and so is the quality of adult support to ensure maximum impact on pupils' learning.
- Teachers rightly focus on improving pupils' literacy, reading and mathematical skills. Pupils' verbal

communication skills are well developed because they listen respectfully to each other and reply thoughtfully to help develop answers. One pupil told the inspector, 'as talking partners, we share ideas and learn more quickly.' Teachers set appropriate homework to reinforce what has been learnt and encourage pupils to research and develop enquiring minds. However, leaders are concerned that pupils do not always choose to read good quality texts at home and it was noted that during school reading sessions, opportunities can be missed to question pupils more deeply to confirm their understanding of what they read.

- Most parents who responded to Parent View felt that teaching was good.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' achievement is typically good. Results in national tests and teacher assessments for Year 6 reflect raised attainment in line with that nationally. This contrasts with past results which reflect a period where not enough teaching was good and pupils did not make the progress they should, particularly in literacy, reading, writing and mathematics.
- Small year groups, high turnover of pupils and widely differing starting points, lead to fluctuations in the school's published results. The school and local authority have verified that some previous information collected on pupils' progress was inaccurate at the end of Year 2. There is still some 'catch up' required for pupils to 'plug the gaps' in their knowledge and skills. However, leaders have taken effective action to tackle the issues that contributed to the dip in achievement.
- For disadvantaged pupils leaving the school in 2014, the gaps closed between reading and writing and they were nearly eight months ahead of their classmates in mathematics and nationally. Pupils throughout the school are making better progress than previously, which shows the effectiveness of the booster activities in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils with special learning needs achieve well. Additional help given in different ways, both within the class and in small groups, is enabling them to achieve at least as well as others in the class and increasingly with others nationally.
- Currently the most able pupils are making better progress than before. However, the school is focused on improving the level of challenge even further to accelerate pupils' learning. Though younger pupils learn basic mathematical skills well, they have fewer opportunities to apply these practically in problem-solving activities. In 2014, at the end of Year 2, no pupils reached the higher levels. This reflected their low starting points. A few more able pupils achieved the higher levels at the end of Year 6.
- The work seen in pupils' books and in learning journals about the Romans and the Saxons, for example, and in lessons confirms the good progress that pupils now make in literacy and mathematics. This ensures that they are well prepared for secondary school.

The early years provision is good

- In some years children join with weak communication skills. Due to the good teaching, children achieve a good level of development across the seven areas of learning expected by the end of Reception. Children's learning needs are well met so that they confidently move on to Year 1 work. Parents are encouraged to help their children learn through reading together, spelling and simple mathematics activities at home and they also contribute to the learning journals.
- Children quickly recognise phonics (the sounds that letters make) and sound out letters or write notes about how to look after the 'bog baby' found in the wood. They count confidently in multiples of 5 and 10 when singing counting songs. They paint and write about fireworks and learn how to stay safe.
- Children behave well, are kind and considerate to each other. Outside, they share their ideas, take turns and explore new learning, whether constructing a train to take a pretend ride or hunting for buried treasure in the sand.
- Leadership and management of the early years provision is good because learning opportunities are well planned and teaching and support for children are effective and ensure that children are eager to learn. Children are safe and well cared for and receive the support they need, including through effective partnerships with external agencies. The outdoor environment is not as effective but the school has identified it as an area to improve.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	126015
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	449038

This inspection of the school 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	82
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elizabeth Reynolds
Headteacher	Penny Kennedy
Date of previous school inspection	24–25 October 2012
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