

St Mary the Virgin CofE VA Primary School

Pheasant Way, Shaftesbury Road, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 4LP

Inspection dates

10–11 October 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	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since her arrival, the headteacher has formed an effective senior leadership team that includes the deputy headteacher and special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). Together they have improved key aspects of the school which had shown signs of some decline since the previous inspection.
- Middle leaders work well with senior leaders. They have clearly delegated responsibilities which increases capacity for school improvement.
- The school's curriculum is rich, broad and exciting. It motivates pupils so that they enjoy attending school and learning.
- Teachers know the pupils well. Typically, they ensure that learning is well matched to pupils' needs. However, some pupils in key stage 1 and early key stage 2 are not challenged enough to build rapidly on their mathematical skills and knowledge.
- Leaders and staff work effectively to meet pupils' social, emotional and personal needs. This includes tailoring support well for those who have additional and complex needs.
- Governors are proactive and work effectively in holding leaders to account. They have a good overall understanding of the work of the school.
- The early years provision is outstanding. Adults are quick to gain an excellent understanding of children's individual needs. They use this well to ensure that children make rapid progress.
- School leaders have been effective in establishing a strong culture of reading. Consequently, pupils enjoy books and literature in a range of situations.
- Although teaching is good overall, there are some inconsistencies in the school. Teachers do not always support and challenge some of the pupils to build quickly on their strong outcomes at the end of the Reception Year.
- Teachers' expectations of spelling are not high enough. As a result, pupils sometimes lack the confidence and knowledge to spell accurately.
- Teachers in Years 5 and 6 ensure that pupils produce high-quality writing across the curriculum, particularly in science. However, this is less well developed in other classes.
- Leaders, including governors, are not strategic enough in checking and revisiting priorities in the school development plan (SDP). This slows the rate of improvement in some areas.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of teaching across the school to ensure that:
 - pupils build quickly on their prior skills, knowledge and understanding to sustain more rapid progress in key stage 1
 - teachers in key stage 1 and early key stage 2 set challenging activities to accelerate pupils' development of skills, knowledge and understanding in number and calculation
 - pupils are able to spell confidently and accurately as they progress through the school
 - pupils write to consistently high standards across the curriculum, especially in science.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by ensuring that leaders, including governors, work more strategically in checking and revisiting priorities on the school's development plan.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since her appointment in September 2015, the headteacher has gained the confidence and respect of the school community. She leads with passion and a clear sense of purpose and direction to see the school improve. Consequently, key aspects of the school are improving well, especially pupils' attendance and provision in the early years.
- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and SENCo have worked effectively to identify and improve key aspects of the school which had shown some decline or turbulence since the previous inspection. For example, a revised behaviour management policy and focus on the early years are having a positive impact.
- Senior leaders have established a cohesive and inclusive leadership team. This increases the school's capacity to improve, as others are strongly involved in decision-making and have gained a good understanding of the school's priorities.
- The school's wider leadership team work together well, especially in sharing information about pupils' progress and welfare. This enables leaders to hold teachers to account about pupils' needs and to plan appropriately for them.
- Middle and senior leaders use a range of systems to monitor the impact of their work and to check how well pupils are doing. However, their work is not always focused enough to drive rapid improvement. For example, they have not checked pupils' mathematical knowledge and understanding closely enough. As a result, leaders do not have a precise knowledge about what the pupils, particularly in Years 1–4, know, can do and understand.
- School leaders and governors ensure that the management of staff and their performance is a priority. For example, teachers' objectives reflect priorities in the SDP. Staff training needs are supported to develop their practice and secure improvements.
- Leaders work closely with others and listen to their points of view, including parents. This successfully promotes a strong ethos so that pupils and staff enjoy coming to the school and morale is high.
- School leaders ensure that pupils have opportunities to learn about the world around them, which has a positive impact on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, pupils learn about other world faiths and some pupils have visited a mosque to learn about other cultures and beliefs.
- Leaders are effective in embedding British values into the work and life of the school. For example, pupils are elected to work as school councillors or to be peer mentors, which encourages pupils to be respectful and tolerant.
- Leaders ensure that the school's curriculum is wide and enriching, including in the arts and in science. This results in some high-quality work, particularly in the upper school. For example, pupils in Year 6 have recently tested and written effectively about lung capacity. They also used this practical example for recording results mathematically on line graphs. However, this quality of work is not seen consistently across the school.

- Leaders offer a range of extra-curricular opportunities, including drama, netball, football and science. Pupils enjoy these, including disadvantaged pupils whose participation in these activities is good.
- The local authority has identified that this is a school that requires only light-touch support. School leaders engage in appropriate external support with their local authority adviser and more so through local working with the Gillingham Area Schools' Partnership (GASP).

Governance of the school

- Governors work closely and effectively with school leaders. They know the school's priorities well and are motivated by a mutual aim to see pupils succeed. They provide an appropriate mix of challenge and support to senior leaders in holding them to account.
- The governing body is proactive in taking steps to improve the school. Governors have seized on the opportunity to work with the current headteacher and use the knowledge she has brought. Governors gave an example of this to an inspector when describing how they worked together in 'transforming' the early years provision.
- Governors use the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, special educational needs and/or disabilities and physical education (PE) and sport effectively. The school's use of additional funds to buy expert advice is having a positive impact on pupils' enjoyment, attendance and outcomes. For example, the school makes effective use of educational psychology support and the emotional literacy support adviser (ELSA).
- Governors are not afraid to make difficult decisions. For example, they have reviewed contractual arrangements for teaching staff to optimise teaching and learning for pupils. However, since the previous inspection, some aspects of the school's work, including the lack of consistency in the quality of teaching, have not been identified or improved quickly enough. This contributed to some decline over time which is now being fully addressed by leaders.
- Governors, including those in the school improvement group (SIG), visit the school. This provides useful information to inform their decision-making. However, visits are not always followed up quickly or strategically, limiting their value and slowing the rate of improvement in some identified areas, such as spelling and phonics.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that all mandatory checks and training for safeguarding are completed appropriately and robustly, including pre-employment vetting arrangements and the single central record. Staff receive timely safeguarding training and updates. As a result, staff are knowledgeable and vigilant to promote a strong culture of safeguarding in the school.
- Leaders are effective in sharing key safeguarding information. Consequently, staff know who to refer concerns to and how to take appropriate action in responding to pupils' needs. The school is moving towards a new secure online system for reporting

and collating referrals or concerns about the pupils. In the meantime, staff have a clear understanding of how to keep pupils safe and report issues.

- Leaders are fastidious in reporting and sharing information with external agencies. They also take the lead in 'flagging' concerns and evidence shows how they initiate referrals on behalf of pupils. This includes informing the local authority when they have had questions about pupils missing from education.
- Pupils say they feel safe. For example, e-safety events support the pupils in knowing how to stay safe online. They trust adults in the school and have confidence that adults intervene and resolve issues quickly if these occur.
- Staff interact well with parents and work effectively with them to improve pupils' attendance and safety. On the few occasions where there have been concerns, leaders tackle these quickly and decisively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers and other adults know the pupils well, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This enables them to build good relationships and motivates pupils to learn.
- Teaching encourages pupils to get involved in their learning. Pupils have choices in their work through, for example, selecting the degree of difficulty in a task or assessing their learning with the class teacher. As a result, pupils are able to reflect critically on their own learning and this helps them to know what they have to do to improve.
- Teachers mostly ensure that learning is well matched to pupils' abilities. This enables pupils to make strong progress in most year groups. However, there are some persistent anomalies, especially in the teaching of mathematics in key stage 1 and early key stage 2. This sometimes slows the development of pupils' understanding, particularly when talking about their approaches to number work.
- Teachers liaise closely with teaching assistants, who add value to pupils' learning. Additional adults are well used and deployed to ensure that pupils are supported to achieve well. This is particularly true of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or have additional needs.
- Teaching promotes a strong culture and ethos for reading. As a result, pupils enjoy books and literature. They talk convincingly about their favourite authors and have a love of reading.
- Homework is relevant and useful. Pupils value this and feel that it helps them, such as in their times-table challenges. Pupils are learning the discipline and skills to be well prepared for the next stage in their learning.
- Teachers' expectations of writing across the curriculum lack consistency, particularly in science. Pupils, particularly the most able pupils, are not given enough opportunity to write effectively at length or in depth. However, this is not the case in Years 5 and 6 where some high-quality writing has been completed in science.
- The teaching of phonics and spelling is effective in the early years. This provides children with a strong starting point. However, teaching sometimes fails to intervene

and target spelling skills effectively. As a consequence, from a good start, some pupils do not rapidly develop their spelling as they move through the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders have introduced a revised behaviour management and rewards system. Pupils abide by this and understand it. It is having a positive impact on behaviour and in supporting the school's Christian ethos and tradition.
- Pupils are proud of the school and enjoy making a positive contribution. For example, school councillors and Year 5 buddies take on meaningful roles and responsibilities to support other pupils.
- Pupils are confident learners and make valuable contributions in lessons. There is an inclusive ethos which is shared and promoted by staff and pupils alike.
- Pupils who have specific or additional needs are generally well cared for. They have support from trusted adults who know them well and help them to manage their behaviour across the school day.
- Despite improvements, there are still some occasions when pupils are distracted or lose interest in lessons. This occurs at those times when teaching is not meeting the pupils' needs well enough.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' general conduct and attitudes around school are good. Pupils take care of each other and mix well. For example, when a child was knocked over it prompted another to spontaneously apologise. However, some pupils, parents and school records confirm that there are sometimes episodes of 'rough' behaviour which, on occasions, unsettle pupils.
- Leaders have a relentless drive and determination to ensure that pupils attend and enjoy school. As a result, attendance is above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils also attend well.
- Leaders track and intervene on behalf of pupils who have persistently high absence. Leaders use a range of external partners and agencies to support pupils and their families in successfully improving attendance.
- Leaders have used exclusion as part of their behaviour policy in the previous and current academic years. A review of documentation showed that, sometimes, administration around these is not sufficiently robust.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- National test results at the end of key stage 2 in 2017 showed positive and encouraging improvement for the school. The sharp rise in progress made by Year 6 pupils in mathematics was notable.
- Disadvantaged pupils make slightly less progress than their peers but are catching up well in reading, writing and mathematics. This is a strength of the school's work and ensures that vulnerable pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.
- Pupils in the early years and in Years 5 and 6 make rapid progress to build on their prior knowledge, understanding and skills across the curriculum.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported to achieve well, including those who have education, health and care plans. Despite some minor flaws in matching work precisely to their needs, plans and strategies are well managed to support pupils overall.
- Vulnerable pupils, including those who speak English as an additional language, are well supported to catch up, especially in key stage 2.
- Pupils' skills across the curriculum are well developed, including in PE, art and history. However, the quality of writing, recording and observation in science is not consistent across the school, particularly for the most able pupils.
- Pupils' reading skills develop well through the school. They gain confidence and fluency so that when they leave in Year 6, pupils can typically read, infer meaning or show comprehension in a variety of text types and in a variety of contexts.
- The progress that pupils make when they leave the early years, especially through key stage 1, slows and does not consistently build on their prior attainment, including for the most able. This means that pupils are not making the same rapid progress seen in other parts of the school, especially in mathematics and reading.
- Pupils' spelling is inconsistent. Although this improves markedly towards the end of key stage 2, this inconsistency sometimes reduces the quality of writing at stages throughout the school.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- The decision of leaders to bring the Nursery into the school in January 2016 has brought the excitement and energy of the early years into the heart of the school. It shows how leaders value the importance of getting the children off to the very best of starts.
- Teachers and leaders know the children exceptionally well. Their assessment information is accurate. They waste no time in getting the children into purposeful, fun and engaging activities. These create interest and curiosity so that children across the early years are quickly gaining levels of independence.
- Teachers and staff know the children's starting points exceptionally well and build quickly on these. As a result, children's personal, social and emotional development is

supported highly effectively. This provides a strong platform for them to make rapid progress and do well.

- Staff inspire the children to be confident. This enables the children to start practising letters and sounds, mark making or writing, and counting very early on. This sets the children up well to succeed. For example, children in the Nursery were seen counting conkers and 'adding one more' to make 9, and ordering numbers to 10.
- The early years curriculum is outstanding. It ensures that children make positive links in their learning through creativity and play. Children interact well together and help each other.
- The progress of the majority of children is rapid across the areas of learning so that children excel. Children are gaining skills rapidly and are very well prepared for the next stage of their education when they leave the Reception Year.
- Adults interact meaningfully with the children. They intervene skilfully to deepen the children's knowledge and understanding. For example, a teaching assistant gently encouraged children to recognise numbers and copy these on a chalk number line in the Nursery.
- Provision is expertly planned and matched to meet the children's needs so that they can learn and develop at a good pace. This promotes constant excitement and a 'buzz' of learning in the Reception and Nursery. It also promotes intrigue, awe and wonder. For example, children independently played with a pumpkin shell and exclaimed, 'It's ginormous!'
- Leaders ensure that the provision for two-year-olds is also outstanding. It meets all requirements for their personal care and well-being. For example, an inspector observed a boy making excellent use of crates by jumping between these to develop his physical skills.
- Safeguarding is effective, including training for paediatric and first aid response on-site. Policies and records of intimate care are fully compliant and followed consistently.
- Parents strongly endorse the work of staff and the quality of the provision in the school. Communication and relationships with parents are excellent. Parents are warmly encouraged by school leaders to contribute to the children's ongoing assessments.

School details

Unique reference number	134020
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10002576

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	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	238
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joanne Hall
Headteacher	Sarah Bullmore
Telephone number	01747 824446
Website	www.stmarygillingham.dorset.sch.uk/
Email address	office@stmarygillingham.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 June 2009

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The number of pupils on the school roll is increasing. St Mary the Virgin is similar to the average-sized primary school.
- The school's provision for the early years includes a class of two-year-olds, Nursery and Reception.
- St Mary the Virgin is a Church of England voluntary aided school within the Diocese of Salisbury.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited all classes, including the early years provision, on both days of the inspection. The headteacher worked closely with the lead inspector throughout the inspection process.
- The lead inspector held meetings with school leaders to evaluate their work. These included the headteacher, deputy headteacher, early years leader (and special educational needs coordinator), the chair of governors and representatives of the governing body. The lead inspector also spoke with an adviser from Dorset local authority and the newly appointed mathematics subject leader.
- Inspectors scrutinised a number of documents, including records of governors' visits, assessment information, the school's self-evaluation, teaching and learning monitoring reports, anonymised performance management records and the school development plan.
- Inspectors undertook extensive scrutiny of pupils' books on both days of the inspection and checked pupils' knowledge against evidence in books. This was to evaluate the accuracy of assessment information and to find out more about what pupils know, can do and understand.
- The lead inspector undertook particular 'sampling' to evaluate the accuracy of teachers' assessments and the effectiveness of teaching for children in the early years.
- Inspectors talked with children through various activities during the inspection and listened to pupils read. Inspectors also undertook walks to explore the culture of reading and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The inspectors observed pupils at playtime and lunchtime.
- Inspectors met with parents and took full account of the views of parents from face-to-face discussions and an additional telephone conversation. There were too few responses on Parent View before or during the inspection to use.

Inspection team

Stewart Gale, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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