

St Nicholas Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

The Street, Tillingham, Southminster, CM0 7TJ

Inspection dates 2–3 July 2015

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.

- Determined leadership has brought about rapid improvement since the previous inspection. All groups of pupils are now making good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The headteacher, supported by the local authority, has proficiently coached staff to improve their teaching.
- Since the last inspection, governors have improved their ability to challenge leaders. They have a good knowledge of the effectiveness of the school and, in particular, the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' achievement.
- The quality of teaching is now good, and most teaching makes learning interesting. Pupils respond positively and are enthusiastic learners. Rigorous systems are in place to check on its quality, involving leaders and governors; and effective strategies have ensured improvement.
- Additional adults within the classroom are adept at supporting the learning needs of pupils.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and they are eager to become successful in their learning. They feel safe because of the school's effective safeguarding routines.
- Children make good progress in the early years. The care and attention of adults enable children to develop their skills confidently.
- The curriculum is enhanced with a wide range of visits, trips, drama and sporting activities. It supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- The expertise of the new management team is ensuring greater consistency in teaching and learning through well-designed staff training and checking the impact of initiatives on pupils' progress.
- As a result of these many positive features, the school has capacity to continue improving.
- The school has received good support from the local authority and the Diocese.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally, teachers do not plan work that is challenging enough for all groups of pupils, especially the most able.
- A small number of pupils do not always take sufficient pride in the presentation of their work and some teachers do not routinely challenge this.
- Children in the Reception Year do not have enough activities in the outdoor area, which develop and extend their physical skills.
- Leaders' strategies for engaging with parents do not help all parents to support their child's learning strongly enough.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed pupils' learning in a range of lessons or parts of lessons and also looked at pupils' work. Four of these observations were conducted jointly with school leaders.
- As well as looking at pupils' work in class, the inspector looked at the work pupils had completed over time in their books.
- The inspector took account of the 41 responses to the online Parent View survey and the school's own recent survey, as well as communications from, and discussions with, parents during the inspection. The views from the 16 returned staff questionnaires were also considered.
- The inspector attended an assembly, heard pupils read and met with staff, pupils, a representative from the local authority and members of the governing body, including the Chair of the Governing Body.
- The inspector looked at a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection, logs of behavioural incidents and attendance figures. She considered the school's self-evaluation and development planning, records of checks on the quality of teaching, and information about pupils' academic achievement.

Inspection team

Susan Thomas-Pounce, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average-sized primary school.
- There are five classes in the school. In Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils are taught in four mixed age classes.
- In the early years, children are taught full time in a Reception class. The school has no Nursery class.
- The school serves a community where most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is above average.
- There were too few pupils in Year 6 in 2014 to make the usual judgement on whether the school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional funding for children in the care of the local authority or pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals) is average. Due to the size of the school, there are usually only two or three disadvantaged pupils in each year group.
- There have been significant changes in staff in the past two years and nearly all staff are new in post. The headteacher was appointed to the school in 2014, after the previous inspection. Two newly qualified teachers joined the staff in September 2014 and the deputy headteacher is currently on maternity leave. The acting deputy headteacher is on secondment from another local school.
- As a member of the Chelmsford Teaching School Alliance, the school is taking part in a pilot school improvement project with the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) Aspire Partner School Programme.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and pupils' achievement by ensuring that:
 - teachers always plan work that is challenging enough for all groups of learners, especially the most able
 - teachers insist that pupils' writing is neat and their work is always well presented
 - activities for children in the Reception Year to develop and extend their physical skills outdoors are improved
- Review and strengthen communication systems in order to work more productively with parents to ensure that they are able to support their children's learning as well as possible.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher's vision and drive for improvement over the past five terms has raised aspirations for the school community, so teaching is consistently good and standards are rising. Decisive action has been taken to strengthen leadership at all levels. Leaders, including governors, set high expectations for learning and behaviour. This fosters a positive culture for learning and respect for the needs of all the pupils. The school now has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.
- Senior and middle leaders make effective use of a wide range of information about the school's performance. They identify the appropriate areas for development in their respective areas of responsibility and plan actions to ensure that these improve. They are involved in regular checks on teaching and on pupils' work. The leadership of special educational needs and the early years is good. Both leaders know what needs to be done to improve their areas of responsibility even further.
- Systems for improving teaching are successful and a wide range of information and data is collected by leaders. Teachers are given clear guidance to help them to improve their teaching and there is a strong focus on professional development for all teachers including those new to the profession. Careful checks on teachers' performance, linked to salary progression, have had a positive impact on lifting standards of teaching and pupils' progress.
- Leaders have targeted the pupil premium effectively and measure its impact in detail. Those disadvantaged pupils who receive the pupil premium funding, those who are disabled, and those who have special educational needs receive effective support in small groups. Additional teaching assistants and subsidising trips all contribute to their overall achievement. As a result, pupils' achievement is good. This exemplifies the school's strong commitment to providing equality of opportunity and tackling any discrimination.
- The primary school sport funding to improve physical education and sport has been effectively spent on a range of resources. These include the skills of specialist teachers who effectively develop pupils' skills in, and enthusiasm for, sport. As a result, participation in physical education and sport has improved and a wide range of additional out-of-school activities and competitions that contribute well towards the pupils' health and well-being are organised. Teachers feel more confident about teaching physical education as their own skills have developed.
- The school is well organised in its curriculum planning and there are many opportunities for pupils to learn outside the classroom. Older pupils, for example, take part in residential trips. Pupils learn about British values such as democracy and law. They have an emerging understanding of democracy through roles on the school council and individual responsibilities, preparing them well for life in modern Britain. Pupils have the opportunity to learn about different faiths in multicultural Britain through focused projects and visits to places of worship.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well through these experiences, the good examples set by members of staff, the links with the church and the local community and work in lessons and assemblies. For example, from the time children start school in the early years and onward, pupils learn to recognise the difference between right and wrong and are encouraged to discuss these aspects.
- Safeguarding meets requirements. The school has thorough systems in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe and regular checks are made on these. A strength of the school is the way in which pupils are cared for, guided and supported in their learning, behaviour and personal development.
- The local authority has worked effectively to introduce a culture of high expectations and holding staff to account. With the support of the Aspire partnership, the leadership team have been effective in identifying aspects of leadership and teaching in need of improvement. They have worked closely with staff to bring about these improvements.

- Comments from some parents indicate a perception that their points of view are not always heard. They feel communication channels between home and school sometimes fail to promote a good enough understanding of school improvement issues. The inspector found that links were generally good but the school wishes to secure greater cooperation and understanding between home and school, and is reviewing the good links they already have to see what can be improved further.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - As a result of a review of governance, governors are better equipped to challenge leaders because they have a secure understanding of performance data and its relationship to the quality of teaching.
 - Governors are actively involved in all aspects of school life. They visit the school regularly to check on the progress pupils are making. Consequently, the governing body knows what is working well and what needs to be improved.
 - Governors use a range of information to compare data on the school with others nationally. They ask questions about pupils' academic performance and hold leaders to account for improving this. They set clear targets for the head teacher.
 - Governors are well informed about the quality of teaching in order to support decisions as to whether teachers should be rewarded with salary increases and to review targets for the headteacher.
 - The governing body manages finances very well by ensuring the close scrutiny of all aspects of budget planning and the use of specific funds, such as pupil premium and sport funding. Governors ensure that all statutory requirements are met, including those with regard to safeguarding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils behave well both in class and when moving around the school. During lunchtime, in the dining hall, pupils get on well and enjoy eating and talking together. Pupils respect one another, are friendly, and care for each other. Relationships with staff and pupils are highly positive.
- Pupils appreciate the school's current focus on improving their learning behaviour, through the 'behaviour ladder'. They say that as well as giving them a greater understanding of how they can improve their learning it has reduced the incidence of low-level disruption in lessons. They now realise how their behaviour affects the learning of others. Good adult support ensures that pupils who present challenging behaviour, and who have barriers to learning, learn to manage their emotions. As a result, they learn to participate fully in school life.
- Staff provide a calm and well-managed environment which supports pupils' good development in lessons. The use of 'working walls', where learning prompts are displayed, contributes to pupils' developing skills of independence in learning. Most pupils enjoy learning and have very positive attitudes. They listen attentively to adults, and show enthusiasm in responding to questions. Pupils enjoy working cooperatively with one another and share ideas. However, on a very few occasions, pupils become a little restless when they are not sufficiently challenged.
- Pupils enjoy taking on additional responsibilities, and the older ones volunteer to help out at break times and lunchtimes, Pupils are articulate when expressing their views and most take care in their work. However, in a few books seen during the inspection, a small number of pupils produced untidy work and do not take enough care or show sufficient pride in their writing.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Pupils learn about safety in different situations. For example, pupils have a good understanding of road safety and how to use the internet safely. Systems for checking that pupils are kept safe are robust and staff are fully trained in spotting and responding to safeguarding issues.
- Pupils say that a trusted adult is always at hand and that they are listened to. They are well aware of the consequences of different types of bullying and extremism such as cyber-bullying, homophobic language,

racism and harassment.

- The care given to potentially vulnerable pupils, and their families when they need support, is deeply rooted in the school's values of trust and compassion. These pupils grow in confidence because they know that they are valued members of the school community.
- Although a few parents expressed concerns about bullying and other matters when responding to Parent View, the school's own recent survey shows that parents are very positive about the school. The large majority of parents agree that the school keeps their children safe and happy. The inspector found that the school deals thoroughly and robustly with the few instances of bullying that have been reported.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is good and much improved since the previous inspection. There are examples of excellent practice because senior leaders have focused on developing high quality teaching through effective coaching, mentoring, and training. Very positive relationships help pupils to make consistently good progress.
- Teachers know their pupils exceptionally well in this small school and are able to check on the progress of each individual and offer support and guidance as appropriate. They assess pupils' work accurately and use this information effectively to review previous learning at the beginning of lessons. This helps them to clarify any misunderstandings and consolidate new ideas.
- Reading and mathematics are taught effectively. The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they make) is good and pupils are encouraged to read different types of books, with older pupils able to discuss their favourite authors and give reasons for their choices. Mathematics teaching is increasingly effective at deepening pupils' understanding and giving them confidence to apply their skills to different types of problems.
- Writing is taught well. Pupils apply their skills of grammar, punctuation and spelling increasingly well to their written work as a result of a clear focus on the teaching of these skills. This was especially evident in a Class 5 literacy task in which pupils shared their ideas of how to develop their use of effective vocabulary to describe feelings. This was based on work they had done the previous day. As they read out their poems, pupils showed good use of vocabulary and grammar to write effectively about their emotions and feelings.
- Teaching is exciting and stimulates pupils to work hard. This was well exemplified in a science lesson where pupils were using their knowledge of what happens when you break a simple electrical circuit. Using batteries, wires and light bulbs, they created light and then explored what happened to the circuit when they added a switch. Pupils learned well because they were enthused by the task which encouraged them to think more and more deeply. Displays of pupils' work celebrate their success and pupils are proud of their work and what they have learned.
- Teaching assistants are skilled, particularly when they are working with pupils who find learning difficult, and they play a key role in the good progress that these pupils make. This is especially true for disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and pupils in receipt of pupil premium. Effective strategies, often developed by the leader for special educational needs, are put in place. Teachers and teaching assistants understand what these pupils know and can do, supporting them well in small group and one-to-one work. Resources are used well to equip pupils with the skills and confidence they need to advance their learning effectively.
- Staff are determined to ensure that no pupil is at risk of falling behind and they are ambitious for all pupils to do their best. This is reflected in the high expectations and challenge seen for pupils in almost every classroom in the school. Although most-able pupils are making good progress, they are not yet sufficiently well challenged in all classes or subjects. Nevertheless, a higher percentage of Year 6 pupils than nationally attained Level 6 in mathematics in 2014.

- Pupils like assessing how well they have done in lessons. The marking by teachers is helpful and consistently applied. Pupils are given time to respond to the comments and are expected to apply their improvements in their next pieces of work. There are a few occasions where pupils complete untidy work and there is little evidence of the teacher providing comments to ensure this is improved.
- Leaders are working hard to overcome the impact of weaker teaching and frequent changes in teachers for some classes in previous years. Parents understandably reflect some dissatisfaction with more turbulent staffing in the past. It is encouraging that staffing is now much more stable; this is helping pupils to make better progress.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' achievement has improved since the previous inspection. As a result of successful improvement strategies, rates of progress have increased and this has enabled pupils to make up any lost ground due to prior poor teaching. Teaching is now good so pupils make good progress.
- At Key Stage 1, achievement in reading, writing and mathematics has improved strongly and is now in line with the national average. The school's results in summer 2014, were the highest for at least four years and current results shows an improving trend.
- Pupils join Key Stage 2 with attainment that is typically lower than average. By the time they leave Year 6, they now attain test results that are broadly average. The proportion of pupils attaining expected levels rose in 2014, with notable improvements in mathematics. Moreover, a much higher proportion than is nationally the case, gained the highest level in mathematics. Overall attainment is now in line with what is expected in Year 6 and far more pupils are now reaching higher levels from Reception upwards.
- The teaching of phonics has improved and standards in the phonics check in Year 1 have risen accordingly. School records show that pupils' progress in reading is good across school. Pupils in Year 6 read widely and fluently. Most show a high level of understanding of the books they are reading and use these skills well in other subjects.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are supported well by skilful staff who know their needs well. These pupils make good and sometimes very good progress from their different starting points.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in each cohort varies widely, often being as few as one. However, almost all are now making the same good progress as their classmates in all year groups, and working at similar levels. Any gaps in their attainment have almost entirely closed. In 2014, there were too few disadvantaged pupils in Year 6 to comment on their achievement without identifying them.
- The most able are also benefiting from improvements in teaching. Consequently, they achieve well. The proportions reaching the higher levels at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 are continuing to rise.

The early years provision is good

- The new early years leader has wasted no time in evaluating the provision, amending action plans accordingly and further improving practice. Children start the early years in the nursery with skills below those typical for their age, particularly in their early literacy and mathematical skills. Children now make much better progress in all the areas of learning from their starting points than was previously the case. The proportion of children reaching a good level of development is now above national expectations.
- The early years is well led and managed. There is a clear vision for the ongoing development of the early years provision. The leader ensures that established, well-considered routines are implemented effectively to keep children safe and to support their good learning.

- Teaching is good. Activities set are effective at gaining and then holding the children’s attention and strengthening their ability to persevere in their work. For example, in an adult-led session, children were learning how to tell the time. As a result, children’s mathematical skills were developing well.

- Children play and cooperate well with one another, showing an enthusiasm for learning. Their behaviour is good and they are able to make choices for themselves, showing good levels of independence. They follow instructions quickly and swiftly learn to share and take turns without fuss. Adults pay close attention to children’s needs and make sure that they are safe at all times.

- Teachers keep extensive records of what the children have achieved. This is regularly shared with parents who are encouraged to contribute by recording important events in their child’s learning. This enables teachers to accurately keep track of the children and plan appropriate activities so that no one falls behind.

- Although children enjoy working and playing in the small outdoor area, it provides fewer exciting opportunities to develop and to extend their physical skills fully.

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	115122
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	462106

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	118
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stephen Holgate
Headteacher	Robert Pike
Date of previous school inspection	10 July 2013
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