

Northchurch St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided First School

Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, HP4 3QZ

Inspection dates 20–21 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Northchurch St Mary's is a friendly and welcoming school, at the heart of the local community.
- Pupils get off to a good start in the Nursery where they experience well-planned teaching in a stimulating environment inside and outside.
- Pupils make good progress in all year groups in reading, writing and mathematics. By the time they leave at the end of Year 4, standards are well-above average in these subjects.
- Teaching is consistently good. Teachers and teaching assistants know pupils well and relationships are excellent.
- The way that teachers provide written feedback in pupils' books is a strength. Pupils are given clear advice about how to improve.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe and well looked after. Attendance is well above average.
- Pupils are keen to learn and their behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. The school provides well for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- School leaders have responded rapidly and effectively to concerns about progress in some year groups. There is a good and effective focus on improving teaching.
- Staff work well together as a team and with a good level of consistency. They are proud of their school.
- Teachers receive a broad range of regular training with timely and very effective support from the local authority.
- Governors have played an influential role in driving forward recent improvements and in overseeing the management of the building works. They are ambitious for the school and provide a high level of challenge to school leaders and other staff.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- More-able pupils are not always challenged enough, so that their progress is not as rapid as it could be.
- Writing has improved, but standards are not as high as in reading and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons. They undertook joint observations with the headteacher and deputy headteacher and observed them feeding back to teachers.
- Inspectors held discussions with pupils during lessons, around the school and in two organised meetings. They spoke with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the two co-Chairs of the Governing Body and three other governors, teachers with subject and other responsibilities, other teachers and support staff.
- The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with the local authority adviser who has been linked to the school.
- Inspectors listened to pupils reading and talked to them about books. They looked at portfolios of children's work and exercise books from all year groups.
- Inspectors took account of the 19 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 55 responses to the online questionnaire for parents, Parent View.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents provided by the school, including progress data, minutes of meetings of the governing body, the school development plan, the self-evaluation report, action plans for subjects, safeguarding documents and records, policies, records of the monitoring of teaching and information relating to teachers' performance targets and training.

Inspection team

Helena McVeigh, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Westall

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Northchurch St Mary's Church of England First School is smaller than the average-sized primary school and takes children up to Year 4. There is a part-time Nursery which currently has 30 children on roll. Most children move into the Reception class from the Nursery when they are old enough.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals and children in the care of the local authority) is well below the national average.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage, with well-below-average proportions from minority ethnic backgrounds. No pupils are at an early stage of learning to speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- There has been a high turnover of teachers since the school was inspected in 2009.
- During the inspection there was extensive building work to accommodate extra classrooms for the expansion to a primary school with pupils up to Year 6 in September.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' achievement further by:
 - ensuring that more-able pupils are always given work that is suitably challenging, so they make even more rapid progress
 - moving pupils quickly on to more demanding work when they have completed a task successfully.
- Improve standards in writing further by:
 - providing more opportunities for older pupils to write at length in literacy and other subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Children enter the Nursery with skills and knowledge that are slightly more advanced than is typical for their age. As a result of the good teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage, children achieve well across all areas of learning. By the time they leave Reception their attainment is above average and they are well prepared for Year 1.
- Progress in the other year groups varies slightly year on year, partly due to the small numbers of pupils. It has improved significantly this year as a result of the leader's determination to ensure equality of opportunity. All year groups are now making securely good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Over several years, the school has sustained a high level of performance in the end of year results for Year 2 pupils. Pupils reach standards well above average in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2013, the proportion of pupils reaching Level 3 (which is above the expected level for their age) was well above average in reading. It was above average but not as high in writing and mathematics. Current school information and pupils' work in books show that the current Year 2 will do even better in mathematics than last year. Reading and writing will be slightly lower, but both still well above the national average.
- Children in all year groups enjoy reading and talking about books. Improvements in the teaching of phonics (sounds that letters make) have resulted in better use of phonics by pupils to read unfamiliar words. The school's most recent assessment indicates that most Year 1 pupils will be successful in this year's screening check.
- Pupils in Year 4 are attaining well-above expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. They approach all their work with enthusiasm and take pride over the presentation of their written work. Their writing includes some good vocabulary and accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation. Standards in writing are not as high as in reading and mathematics. There is not enough evidence of pupils writing at length in their books for literacy or other subjects.
- Year 4 pupils are progressing well in mathematics and tackle problems with interest and determination. Their recall of number facts is often very good. They are well prepared for the next phase of their education.
- More-able pupils make good progress and attain above-average standards in all subjects. However, there are times in all year groups when they are not challenged enough and they finish their work quickly or find it easy.
- There are small numbers of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium in each class; in some cases, none. The progress of these pupils is tracked closely by teachers and they are given extra support as necessary. They are making good progress and attaining as well as their classmates. The numbers are too small to make year on year comparisons meaningful.
- Pupils who are disabled, those who have special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language achieve well and make good progress. Their needs are identified quickly and appropriate support is arranged for them.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good and improving.
- Teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Staff have an acute understanding of how young children learn. They provide a good range of worthwhile activities inside and outside to foster children's skills and their personal development. Staff plan well and provide ample opportunities for children to develop as confident learners. Children are prepared well for Year 1 as a result of the well-focused teaching of literacy and numeracy.
- Relationships are excellent in all classes and teachers have high expectations of how pupils will behave and respond to their instructions. Teachers' subject knowledge is mainly secure and they use this well to ask pertinent questions that make pupils think. They encourage pupils to discuss answers to questions or to write them on their mini-white boards, which ensure that all are involved.
- Teachers plan carefully and teaching assistants are deployed effectively to provide pupils with support where it is needed. Teachers attempt to provide activities that will suit different levels of ability. Whilst this is often effective, teachers do not always spot when work is too easy for the more-able pupils. The more-able pupils are not always moved on quickly enough to more challenging work.
- The school has reviewed its teaching of phonics following below-average results in the phonics screening checks in 2012 and 2013, although reading results were good. Teaching of phonics is now good and the school predicts much better outcomes in this year's screening check.
- There has been a focus on improving writing, which is having a positive impact on standards. Teachers also ensure that writing tasks capture the interest of boys as well as girls, so that they all make good progress. Pupils are encouraged to write regularly, from the Nursery onwards. Pupils make good use of writing materials, such as chalk, pencils and paper, which they are given during playtimes. Older pupils do not have enough opportunities to write long stories or accounts.
- The quality of written feedback to pupils is consistently good and is a strength. Pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve from teacher's detailed comments and questions. A good level of dialogue is established, with pupils acting on teachers' comments and answering their questions.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They behave well in classrooms, around the school and in the playground. Most parents and pupils say that behaviour is good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and their attendance is well-above average.
- Children develop an enjoyment of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. They play enthusiastically and sensibly, sharing toys and taking turns. They are developing respectful attitudes to adults and each other.
- Pupils in all year groups have good attitudes to learning. They settle quickly in lessons and are keen to learn. Most pupils listen attentively to teachers and concentrate on their work. They cooperate well with others and share resources sensibly. Sometimes a few pupils lose concentration and do not push themselves to work as quickly as they could.

- The school's focus on values and good behaviour is effective and staff manage pupils' behaviour consistently well. Relationships are a strength of the school and exemplified by the way that staff speak to pupils and help them during playtimes outside. Pupils are learning to respect the views of others and to accept differences of opinion.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. All safeguarding responsibilities are met. Staff have been extra vigilant to maintain pupils' safety during the building work. Pupils say that they feel safe and parents agree with this. Pupils say that staff listen to them when they have any concerns.
- Pupils know about different forms of bullying and how to keep themselves safe, including when they use the internet. Incidents of bullying are rare and dealt with rigorously and effectively.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and governors have a clear and ambitious vision for the school, with a recent decision to take pupils through to Year 6. Leaders have retained a strong focus on improving teaching and learning in spite of the disruption caused by the extensive and intrusive building work to provide the necessary extra classrooms.
- High staff turnover and a depleted leadership team had a negative impact on pupils' progress in recent years. Staffing is now more stable and leadership strengthened with the addition of an effective deputy. A great deal has been achieved in the past year with a positive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress.
- School leaders check the quality of teaching regularly. Subject leaders are increasingly effective in overseeing their areas. Pupils' progress is checked frequently and there are regular meetings to review progress and plan next steps for pupils who are falling behind. The result of these initiatives has been to achieve a good level of consistency in the quality of teaching and improvement in outcomes for pupils. Leaders have an accurate view of teaching quality and what is needed to move it to outstanding.
- The school has a firm commitment to equality of opportunity for pupils and staff. Morale is high and staff speak of 'being proud' of their school. They feel valued and have had a good range of opportunities for training for their different roles. All staff, including lunch time supervisors, are given performance targets to work to and are supported to achieve them.
- The school has received timely, well-judged and very effective challenge and support from the local authority. School leaders have taken advantage of a range of local authority training that has been appreciated and effective.
- The school offers pupils a broad range of subjects with a strong focus on literacy and numeracy. There are well-planned opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils appreciate what one pupil described as 'millions' of after-school clubs and educational trips. There are strong links with the local church which pupils visit every other week.
- The school has made good use of its additional sports funds. The physical education leader has prepared a detailed plan for the funds, which have paid for sports equipment, and to buy in specialist coaching for sports such as tennis. Funds are also used to transport pupils to take part in competitions with other schools. The school is making sure that all pupils benefit from the sports funds and that it is having a positive impact on their physical fitness and health.

■ The governance of the school:

- Governance is a real strength of the school. Governors know the school well and several are frequent visitors to the school, where they provide a good balance of challenge and support
- Governors hold school leaders relentlessly to account and set challenging targets for the headteacher and for pupils. They oversee the performance target setting process for staff and are well informed about the quality of teaching and how underperformance is addressed. They ensure that pay awards to staff are fully warranted
- Governors ask searching questions on every aspect of the school with keen attention to how the school is helping to raise pupils' attainment and progress. They are keen to learn and extend their skills and expertise by undertaking regular training and seeking advice from the local authority
- Finances are managed prudently and governors have been instrumental in securing the best outcome for the new school building. They oversee the use of pupil premium funding to ensure it is spent wisely and appropriately. They have ensured that each eligible pupil receives some benefit from the funds, such as one-to-one support, counselling, payment for equipment or after-school clubs
- Governors are managing the oversight of the building project to allow the headteacher to focus on improving teaching and learning in the school. This is proving to be effective.

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	117424
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	439575

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

Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	156
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev. Jonathan Gordon and Mark Drew
Headteacher	Eloise Haezewindt
Date of previous school inspection	12 May 2009
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