

Stella Maris Catholic Primary School

Parkfield Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5BY

Inspection dates 5–6 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	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.

- Achievement across the school is good because teaching has improved and it is now usually good and sometimes outstanding.
- The proportion of pupils making and exceeding expected progress is above average, especially in reading.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, together with pupils entitled to support under the pupil premium, and pupils who speak English as an additional language, also make good progress.
- Phonics teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage and by the end Key Stage 1 is good and so pupils develop their skills for reading and writing well.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good, and pupils' attitudes are very positive. Pupils enjoy coming to school, as is reflected in their above-average attendance.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well across the school in lessons, through displays and in the daily acts of collective worship.
- Leaders and managers, including governors, have improved the quality of teaching significantly since the last inspection, demonstrating good capacity to improve further.
- Parents and carers hold positive views about the school and all who responded on Parent View said they would recommend the school to another parent or carer.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet outstanding in all year groups.
- Achievement in writing is not as good as that in reading, where achievement is particularly good, or mathematics, especially for more able pupils.
- Opportunities for pupils to read and act on teachers' feedback are limited.
- Although progress for all groups of pupils is above average, there are sometimes small but noticeable gaps between the achievement of boys and girls.
- Middle leaders are not held fully to account for standards in core subjects.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons or parts of lessons, taught by eight teachers. Five lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher, deputy headteacher or assistant headteacher. In addition, inspectors heard pupils in Year 2 and Year 6 read.
- Discussions were held with groups of pupils, teachers, the chair of the governing body and a local authority adviser.
- Inspectors took account of 26 questionnaires completed by staff. There were 15 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View). Parents' views were also gathered during the Advent breakfast on the first day of the inspection.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's plans for improvement and minutes of governing body meetings. They also examined documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance, and the performance management of staff.
- A range of other evidence was also scrutinised by inspectors, including pupils' current work in books and the school's own data and monitoring records of how well pupils progress in their learning.

Inspection team

Angela Konarzewski, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Barbara Saltmarsh

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The size of the school is below average. Each year group has its own class and there is one Reception class in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to support under the pupil premium (which provides additional funding for looked-after children, those known to be eligible for free school meals and other groups) is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is average, with a higher-than-average proportion learning English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is above average, while the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The majority of these include pupils with moderate learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders.
- The school currently meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that more of it is consistently outstanding and so all pupils, most notably the more able, make more rapid progress from their starting points, especially in writing, by:
 - ensuring that work is consistently well matched to pupils' different levels of ability in all year groups and that more-able pupils are always appropriately challenged
 - reducing the amount of work completed on worksheets in Key Stage 1 so as not to limit learning, especially for higher-ability pupils
 - ensuring that marking and feedback in workbooks, particularly in writing, consistently give pupils information about what they need to do to improve their work, and that pupils have regular opportunities to act on feedback.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that teachers understand the features of outstanding teaching so they can improve their own practice and the progress all groups of pupils make
 - ensuring that boys and girls consistently have opportunities to perform as well as each other
 - developing middle leaders' skills through increasing their accountability for standards and opportunities to make checks on pupils' progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Standards by the end of Year 6 in 2013 were in line with the national average in reading, writing and mathematics, although they were below average at the higher levels, especially for girls, in the English grammar, punctuation and spelling tests and in writing.
- Most children enter school with skills well below levels typical for their age, especially in their language and communication skills. They make good progress across the Early Years Foundation Stage, especially in their literacy and mathematical skills, and they enter Year 1 at levels that are below average overall, but not well below, as when they joined the school.
- In summer 2013, the proportion of pupils reaching age-related expectations in the Year 1 phonics screening check was in line with the national average because of the good phonics (letters and sounds) teaching children receive from the start.
- Pupils continue to make good progress across Key Stage 1, so that by the end of Year 2, they are reaching levels that are in line with national averages, except in writing, where higher-ability pupils do not do as well as their peers nationally.
- Differences in the achievement of boys and girls begin in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Girls continue to do marginally better than boys across Key Stage 1 in all subjects; in Key Stage 2, the trend is reversed, so that boys tend to do better than girls over time.
- Standards reached by the 2013 Year 6 cohort in 2009, when they were in Year 2, were particularly low. They made up for this across Key Stage 2, so that progress for almost all pupils was significantly above the national average by the end of Year 6.
- Pupils who are eligible for support through the use of pupil premium funding make good progress. The gap between their achievement and that of other pupils in both English and mathematics has closed since 2012, and continues to do so, because of the effective extra support they are receiving.
- Pupils who are disabled and those who have special educational needs make good progress because those who lead and manage this aspect ensure that their needs are appropriately met.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language also make good progress because support for them is well targeted.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is usually good in most classes, and there is some outstanding teaching, consistently so in Year 4.
- Good teaching was seen in lessons where pupils were deployed to learn through practical activities. For example, in a mathematics lesson in Year 3, pupils enjoyed applying their knowledge of weighing and measuring to baking cup-cakes. Similarly, in a Year 5 science lesson, pupils enjoyed learning about changing states through melting chocolate to make chocolate crispy cakes.
- Where teaching is outstanding, the teacher works in partnership with the teaching assistant to teach highly engaging lessons. He uses puppets, cuddly toys and character hats to motivate and excite pupils, and these techniques, alongside his excellent subject knowledge, ensure that all children make exceptional progress. For example, in a letter-writing task linked to the book, *Street Child*, pupils were inspired to write: 'I was nostalgic, thinking about happier times... Subsequently, we squelched through the snow until we found a beautiful mansion.'
- Teaching in the Reception class is usually good, especially in children's communication, language and literacy skills, including phonics, and in mathematics. Excellent practice for recording progress in literacy and mathematics is not currently extended to all areas of learning, however, so that planning is not clearly linked to children's prior achievements across all areas. Some gender stereotyping, as a result of children's choices, remained unchallenged when preparations

for the Christmas Nativity play were observed.

- Teachers usually give appropriate feedback when they mark pupils' work, but opportunities to read and act upon advice are limited, so pupils do not improve their skills as quickly as they could. Where basic errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation are not corrected, progress in this aspect, now tested at the end of Key Stage 2, is hindered.
- Pupils perceived to be vulnerable do well because of the good support they receive from teaching assistants. However, at times, pupils of higher ability are not appropriately challenged in both key stages. In Key Stage 1, the whole class is sometimes given the same worksheet to complete, restricting more able pupils from doing their best.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour is not yet outstanding because there is some low-level misbehaviour that has to be managed by staff.
- Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and that they feel very safe, and this is reflected in their above-average attendance.
- Attitudes in lessons are very positive and all staff have excellent relationships with their pupils. One Year 6 pupil commented that: 'Staff are always smiling and they want us to be happy.'
- Outside lessons, pupils continue to be respectful towards one another. Some minor fall outs were seen to be well managed.
- The school tackles discrimination and fosters good relations well. Equal opportunities are promoted well.
- Pupils report that there is very little bullying, and that it is dealt with effectively when it does occur. They have a very good understanding of all kinds of bullying, and recognise that to be referred to as 'gay' is deeply insulting. They know about cyber-bullying and how to keep themselves safe when using the internet. They are aware of the need to involve adults, including parents and carers, over any such incidents.
- Parents who responded to the online questionnaire were very positive about the school in relation to behaviour management and bullying. Some parents and pupils who were interviewed expressed the view that they would like more feedback following the reporting of such incidents, though few and far between. Parents agree that pupils feel very safe.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and senior leaders have shown perseverance and unswerving drive on their long, arduous journey to turn Stella Maris into the good school that it has become.
- The headteacher pays tribute to his staff, who are unanimously positive about their role in the school. He also commends the advice and support he has received from his local authority adviser since the last inspection, enabling him to address weaknesses in teaching. The headteacher prides himself in leading a 'learning community', attributing his success to all that he has learnt from the adviser and from colleagues. Inspectors agreed with the headteacher's self-evaluation.
- Checks on individual pupils' progress are now much more rigorous, and information gained is used well to make regular adjustments to provision when underperformance is identified. As a result, progress across the school is good for almost all pupils.
- Systems for managing staff performance hold teachers appropriately to account for pupil progress and leaders have successfully addressed underperformance since the last inspection, demonstrating good capacity to improve further.
- The leadership of middle leaders is less well developed where they are not currently held to account for the progress of different groups of pupils or standards in their subjects.
- Safeguarding arrangements are thorough, and there is an explicit culture of safety that is recognised by parents and pupils.

- The school curriculum offers pupils exciting opportunities for learning in contexts that are interesting and motivating for them. For example, children in Reception went to the woods to hunt for the 'Gruffalo'. In Year 3, as part of their rainforest topic, pupils 'camped' for an evening on the school field where they ate round a camp fire and the headteacher read 'spooky' stories to them; the topic on chocolate in Year 5 was enhanced by a visit to a chocolate factory.
- The new sports funding has been used to pay sports coaches to provide lunchtime activities, thereby reducing the number of behaviour-related incidents. These coaches also provide a range of high-quality sports activities in the afternoons. Pupils also benefit from participation in a wide range of local competitions, including football, basketball and cricket.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is of great importance in the school. Candles inspire warmth and give light in the Advent breakfast, in assemblies and in a successful Year 3 lesson on the Annunciation, when Gabriel told Mary she would become the mother of Jesus. Pupils wrote moving prayers during this lesson, to the music of 'Ave Maria', thanking Mary for her courage and for her example. Colourful displays around the school also provide evidence that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well.
- The school benefits from links with a small group of primary schools in Folkestone. They have worked together on a number of projects, including some linked to the new national curriculum for computing.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors make regular visits to the school to monitor aspects of its work; however, they do not often write formal reports, so their findings are not always recorded. The headteacher's reports to governors give detailed information on pupils' progress, enabling governors to hold the school to account for achievement. Governors know the school well and are aware of how staff performance has been managed to improve the quality of teaching. They are aware of how the pupil premium funding is being spent and that pupils entitled to it are making better progress than previously. The chair is very experienced in his role as a governor, and he provides the governing body with strong leadership. He is pleased that the school has improved significantly since the last inspection, particularly in relation to the management of staff performance. Governors undertake regular, relevant training, including that linked to appraisal and performance management. They ensure that rigorous safeguarding procedures are in place and that financial management arrangements are robust.

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	118862
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	426488

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Primary
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	195
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Joe Ciantar
Headteacher	Tony Holdsworth
Date of previous school inspection	23–24 February 2012
Telephone number	01303 252127
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