

St Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School

Magdalen Road, St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN37 6EU

Inspection dates

12–13 February 2019

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	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The highly effective interim leadership has put the school firmly back on track following years of underperformance.
- The interim arrangements for governance are strong, and there are appropriate plans in place to secure long-term leadership and governance.
- Leaders' determination to shift the culture to one in which there are high expectations of everyone has been an important factor in the school's on-going improvement.
- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved since the previous inspection and are now good. However, there remain some inconsistencies, especially in the teaching of writing.
- While the curriculum makes interesting links across subjects, it is not fully consistent in promoting pupils' secure understanding across a range of different subjects.
- Most pupils currently in school, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well.
- Pupils' progress is stronger than in previous years. Nonetheless, the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, are capable of more. Although they are challenged well in mathematics, this is not consistently the case in other subjects.
- Pupils' behaviour is good, and their attendance has improved. Pupils feel safe at the school and show respect to each other and to adults.
- Children make good progress in the early years and are prepared well for Year 1.
- Despite the improvements in the school's effectiveness, too many parents and carers do not have confidence in the work of the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to share the best practice, especially in the teaching of writing, so that all teaching is of a consistently high quality.
- Ensure that teaching provides appropriate challenge for the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, who have the potential to reach the higher standards.
- Strengthen the curriculum so that pupils learn subject-specific knowledge and skills across a wide range of subjects.
- Continue to work with parents to help them have full confidence in the school's work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The interim leadership team, consisting of the executive head, the head of school and the assistant headteacher, demonstrates an unwavering determination to bring about school improvement. Together, the team has the highest aspirations for all and works tirelessly to galvanise other leaders and staff. As a result, weak teaching has been tackled robustly. The school now provides a good and improving quality of education for the first time in many years.
- Senior leaders have a highly accurate understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas for improvement. The school improvement plan is appropriately focused on the current position and the school's next steps.
- Despite a period of turbulence in staffing and leadership, staff morale is high. Staff are committed to the new vision that all pupils, no matter what barriers to learning they may have, should achieve well.
- Effective partnerships with the local authority and diocese have been instrumental in the school's improvement since the previous inspection. The local authority has provided interim leadership and has replaced the governing body with an interim executive board (IEB). Beneficial partnerships with other schools have resulted in the school being far more outward looking in its desire to improve.
- Subject leaders are enthusiastic about improving teaching and pupils' outcomes. They have appropriate plans in place to help them carry out their roles effectively. They are supported well by senior leaders, who hold them rigorously to account.
- The leadership of mathematics is well established and the impact of this is very evident. The newly appointed English leader has made a good start to the role, but this is early days and the impact of her actions are yet to be fully seen.
- Leaders have successfully ensured that staff are increasingly able to meet the higher demands placed on them. Support for teachers is timely and well thought through. Consequently, teaching has improved markedly since the previous inspection and continues to improve.
- Strategies designed to accelerate the progress of all pupils are effective. Leaders make frequent checks on pupils' achievement and take swift action where pupils are at risk of falling behind.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is spent effectively, with well-targeted support to make sure these pupils make the progress they should. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make increasingly good progress. Nevertheless, there is more to do to ensure that the most able disadvantaged pupils make even stronger progress and reach the higher standards of which they are capable. Leaders recognise this and improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils still further is a priority in the school's development plan.
- The leadership of provision for pupils with SEND is strong. Effective partnerships with a wide variety of outside agencies, as well as with parents, have been established. The special educational needs leader (SENCo) has a wide knowledge of the needs of this

group of pupils. As a result, appropriate support is provided so that pupils with SEND make good progress from their starting points.

- Leaders have made a good start to improving the curriculum so that there are meaningful links across subjects. For example, pupils learn about the local area by finding out about the Battle of Hastings and learning about Guy Fawkes during role play. Physical education is developed well, and pupils say they enjoy the after-school clubs. Pupils were excited to talk about the dance competition they entered during the inspection.
- Although there are strengths in the current curriculum, there is more to do to ensure that it provides the opportunities necessary for pupils' high-quality learning across a wide range of subjects.
- The school's emphasis on teaching pupils how to keep themselves fit and healthy contributes directly to pupils' physical and emotional well-being. The sports premium funding is used effectively to support this and pupils' participation in sports has increased.
- Many of the parents who spoke with inspectors during the inspection, or who responded to Ofsted's online survey Parent View, agree that the school is well led and managed. Inspection findings support this view. However, there are parents who disagree. More could be done to encourage all parents to have full confidence in the school's work.

Governance of the school

- The IEB, led by a highly skilled chair, provides exceptionally strong governance. The expert advice, guidance and support which governors offer to school leaders have made a significant contribution to the school's ongoing improvement.
- Governors make frequent visits to the school, talking to pupils, staff and leaders. As a result, they have a high level of knowledge about the strengths of the school as well as the areas for improvement. Governors use this knowledge to hold leaders rigorously to account for their impact on improving pupils' outcomes.
- As well as ensuring appropriate challenge, governors also provide good support, for example during the restructuring of staff and when tackling weak teaching.
- An important aspect of the IEB's work is to secure leadership of the school in the long term. Governors have appropriate plans in place to recruit a substantive headteacher. They also have well-timed plans to support the new governing body, to be formed ready for the new academic year.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Following the appointment of the interim executive headteacher and head of school, much good work has been done to tackle weaknesses in safeguarding. Statutory policies and procedures are now in place. Safeguarding processes are robust and appropriate.

- There is a strong culture of safeguarding which permeates the school. Staff receive timely training. They receive weekly reminders about how to deal with different safeguarding issues. Every staff meeting has a safeguarding agenda item. In these ways, staff are kept up to date with changes or developments in child-protection matters.
- Strong support from the safeguarding governor results in frequent checks to make sure systems are up to date and effective. Safeguarding at the school is, rightly, a high priority for leaders, governors and staff.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The teaching of mathematics is a strength. Teachers have embraced the recently introduced strategy to improve the teaching of mathematics. They use it to good effect. Work in pupils' books shows that there is a consistent approach to the teaching of mathematics. This means that pupils are confident with routines and no time is wasted. Teachers provide practical resources to support pupils' learning. Pupils are encouraged to draw diagrams to help them explain their thinking about how they have solved mathematical problems. Pupils say this helps them to justify their answers.
- The teaching of reading is effective. Phonics is taught well. Pupils were keen to say how much their teachers enjoy reading which helps to inspire them to read. Pupils can talk about their favourite books and authors.
- Teaching is often linked to a 'class text'. For example, Year 5 pupils explored the impact of the destruction of the rainforest after reading 'The Boy in the Tower'. They developed their geographical understanding by locating rainforests on a world map and wrote high-quality reports about animals in the rainforest. They used their knowledge to contribute to a class debate, developing their speaking and listening skills. This type of teaching also contributes well to pupils' personal development.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge contributes well to pupils' learning. Teachers ask searching questions which help to extend pupils' learning and identify gaps in their understanding. For example, during the inspection, Year 6 pupils used cocktail sticks to answer the 'big question' of the best shape for a bird's beak. Pupils' science books show that these types of activities are increasingly typical.
- Teachers usually use the information they have about pupils' learning to pitch activities which provide appropriate challenge. This is particularly evident in mathematics, where work is often very well matched to all groups of pupils. However, at other times, teachers are less successful in promoting the depth of knowledge and understanding that the most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, could achieve.
- Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning. They work well to support individual pupils and small groups. They build positive relationships with pupils and ensure that they question pupils carefully.
- Teaching, learning and assessment have improved significantly since the previous inspection. Although teaching is typically good, some inconsistency remains. The very effective practice in some classes has not yet been shared fully across the school. This is particularly the case for the teaching of writing, which is improving less quickly than that of reading and mathematics.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school has a happy, nurturing atmosphere. Pupils are polite and kind to each other. Relationships between adults and pupils are positive and respectful. Pupils feel they can talk to an adult if they have worries. These aspects contribute positively to pupils' emotional well-being.
- Pupils willingly take on responsibilities around the school. Year 6 pupils happily help their 'buddies' in Reception at lunchtime and while playing outside. The myriad of opportunities to contribute to school life, for example as sports leaders or monitors, help to develop pupils' confidence and self-esteem. These types of activities help to prepare pupils as responsible citizens.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves healthy. Pupils enjoy taking part in the 'mile a day', using the equipment at playtimes and participating in a variety of sports.
- Pupils feel safe. They learn how to keep themselves safe, both in and out of school, for example when using the internet, visiting the nearby coast or on school trips.
- Pupils understand what bullying is and say that adults deal with any incidents of unkindness that occur. School records confirm this view.
- The breakfast and after-school club provides a safe, welcoming place for pupils to play and be with their friends outside school time.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The school is a calm and orderly place. Pupils are clear about what is expected of them. Adults are good role models and have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes. Although some pupils do not always have the self-discipline to regulate their own behaviour, pupils behave well with the supervision of adults.
- Leaders keep a careful check on pupils' behaviour and evaluate their records to look for any trends. Rates of fixed-term exclusions have fallen.
- Over time, pupils have not attended school as regularly as other pupils nationally. However, the school has rigorous systems in place to keep a check on pupils' attendance, and leaders take action when a pupil's attendance slips. These measures are proving successful. So far this year, attendance rates for all groups of pupils are much better.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- As a result of the effective actions by leaders, outcomes at the end of Year 6 have improved year on year since the previous inspection. In 2018, the proportion of pupils who reached age-related expectations in the combined measure of reading, writing and

mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was higher than the national average. Progress was especially good in reading and mathematics. This prepared pupils well for secondary school.

- The proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check has been at least in line with the national average over the last three years.
- Outcomes at the end of key stage 1 have improved markedly. In 2018, the proportions of pupils who reached age-related expectations and higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics were all above the national averages. This prepared them well for the increased demands of key stage 2.
- Across the school, current pupils are achieving well in a range of subjects, especially in reading and mathematics. While progress in writing is good overall, it lags behind that of reading and mathematics. This is because, although there are appropriate improvement plans in place, they have not yet been fully implemented.
- Pupils who join the school with little or no English make good progress. Effective academic and pastoral support means pupils feel welcomed and so make a prompt start to their learning.
- The achievement of the most able pupils is mostly good. However, at times, their progress is hindered because teaching does not consistently provide an appropriate level of challenge.
- As a result of effective teaching, together with carefully targeted additional support, disadvantaged pupils currently in the school make increasingly good progress. However, the most able disadvantaged pupils are still capable of achieving more.
- Pupils with SEND make good progress overall, typically from lower starting points. This is because they are given effective support, carefully tailored to their needs.
- Pupils currently in Year 6 who spoke to inspectors reported that they were being prepared well for secondary school. They are proud of what they achieve and especially value being given responsibilities in order to develop their self-confidence. All pupils were happy to talk about their achievements and said that they enjoyed learning.

Early years provision

Good

- In 2018, the proportion of children who reached a good level of development at the end of Reception was similar to the national average. This represented good progress from their starting points.
- Teaching in the early years is good. Children eagerly engage in the exciting activities on offer. For example, during the inspection, children explained why they made animal masks as part of the Chinese New Year celebrations. Children were keen to show the banners that they made to accompany their drumming, while the Chinese 'dragon' danced around the outside area. These types of activities are well planned and keep children interested for sustained periods of time. However, at times, activities, particularly those relating to writing, are not sufficiently challenging to make sure that the most able children progress as swiftly as they should.

- Due to the increasing number of children who join Reception with low levels of English, there is a renewed focus on supporting children's language skills. Additional training for adults ensures they are appropriately trained and sufficiently skilled to give children the support they need. As a result, there are high-quality interactions between adults and children which move children's learning on well. As well as helping children who are new to learning English, these interactions help all children make good progress, including those who are disadvantaged and children with SEND.
- As elsewhere in the school, relationships between adults and children are strong. Routines are quickly established, and children behave well. They learn to play happily and take turns, for example when finding out which shape of container holds the most water or when playing in the role play area.
- Adults know each child very well. Home visits and visits by parents and their children in the summer, prior to starting school, mean that adults get to know each child quickly.
- Once in school, adults make appropriate assessments of children's learning and select activities which provide interesting opportunities for them to explore the world around them. For example, during the inspection, children were keen to explain what happens when they take their pet to the classroom's 'vet's surgery'.
- The leadership and management of early years are effective. The leader knows the strengths of teaching and aspects for further improvement, for example ensuring more children reach the higher standards by the end of Reception. She has ensured that the early years provides a safe, nurturing environment in which children can enjoy learning and be prepared well for Year 1.

School details

Unique reference number	114574
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10058129

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	223
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Melanie Cox
Headteacher	Catrin Jones (Interim Executive Headteacher)
Telephone number	01424427801
Website	http://www.st-mary-star.e-sussex.sch.uk/
Email address	office@st-mary-star.e-sussex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	18-19 October 2016

Information about this school

- St Mary Star of the Sea is a Roman Catholic primary school. A section 48 inspection was carried out in July 2015.
- It is smaller than the average-sized primary school. There are seven classes from Reception to Year 6. Children in the early years are taught in one full-time Reception class.
- The school is currently led by an interim executive headteacher and an interim head of school from the local authority, who each work three days a week at the school. Several teachers are new to the school since the previous inspection.
- Following the previous inspection, the local authority established an IEB to replace the governing body.

- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils identified with SEND is slightly higher than the national average.
- The school has a diverse population. Just over one third of pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is higher than the national average.
- The school runs a breakfast and after-school club.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited all classes to gather a wide range of evidence to evaluate the typical quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Inspectors were joined by senior leaders for almost all of these visits.
- Inspectors looked closely at pupils’ work, spoke with staff and pupils and observed activities taking place in the classrooms. Inspectors heard some pupils read and talked to them about their experiences of school life and their learning, to find out what it is like to be a pupil at St Mary Star of the Sea. Inspectors spoke to pupils informally at lunchtime and playtime.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, subject leaders, a representative from the diocese, the local authority and a group of members from the IEB, including the chair.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents, gathered from 35 responses to Ofsted’s online survey Parent View and the 20 free-text comments. Inspectors also had conversations with parents at the start of the school day. Inspectors took account of 14 responses to Ofsted’s online staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including those related to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, the school’s evaluation of its own performance and the school’s development plans.

Inspection team

Joanna Toulson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Lesley Fisher-Pink	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2019