

St Mark's Elm Tree CofE Voluntary Aided Primary School

St Mark's Close, Bishopton Road West, Fairfield, Stockton-on-Tees, County Durham, TS19 7HA

Inspection dates 6–7 February 2013

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.

- Children get a good start to their time in school as they settle into the Nursery quickly and make particularly good progress in their personal development, speaking and listening skills.
- Pupils achieve well. They make good and sometimes outstanding progress across the school; consequently, they reach standards that are above average by the time they leave in Year 6.
- Good quality teaching and the effective use of questioning in lessons ensures pupils make at least good progress. Lessons are designed to meet pupils' needs and, as a result, they engage pupils well. A creative approach to teaching also inspires pupils to learn.
- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe as the school makes it a priority. Behaviour is good and sometimes better as relationships across the whole school are strong and everyone is valued.
- The headteacher is ambitious for the school and is proactive in making improvements. She is well supported by a strong leadership team and a cohesive team of staff and governors. A determination to improve and rigorous checks on how well it is doing, is beginning to take teaching to the next level and raise standards further.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils do not get precise enough guidance on how to improve their writing. The teaching of grammatical skills is not always effective. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage do not have enough opportunities to develop their writing skills.
- Teaching is not yet outstanding as pupils are not sufficiently independent in their learning. The use of success criteria and the pace of teaching, including reviewing learning during lessons, do not drive faster progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 28 lessons or parts of lessons, of which two were joint observations with the headteacher.
- Inspectors observed groups of pupils working with teaching assistants and specifically listened to pupils from Years 1 and 2 read, as well as other year groups in lessons.
- Inspectors talked to a range of pupils, including the school council, about their work and play in the school.
- Meetings were held with five governors as well as teaching staff, including senior and subject leaders. Discussions were held with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 22 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) when planning the inspection and considered staff questionnaires. They also considered responses to pupil questionnaires that the school had completed over the last three years.
- Inspectors observed the overall work of the school and looked at a number of documents including the school's data about pupils' current progress. They also looked at documents relating to safeguarding, governance, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors looked at a range of other evidence including school displays, its website, and evidence representing the school's wider achievements beyond the classroom.

Inspection team

David Shearsmith, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Diane Coleman

Additional Inspector

Geoffrey Seagrove

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is similar in size to the average-sized primary school.
- A well below average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which is additional funding for pupils eligible for free school meals, children in the care of the local authority and children of service families.
- An above average proportion of pupils are supported at school action. An average proportion of pupils are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The school has achieved Investors in People, Basic Skills and National Able Children, Challenge awards.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school has a breakfast club managed by the governing body.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is taught in two Reception classes and a Nursery class.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is outstanding by:
 - allowing pupils to accelerate their own learning through activities that involve investigations and problem solving
 - improving the pace of learning through regular reviews of pupils' learning throughout the lesson to increase pupils' understanding and progress
 - using success criteria more effectively and consistently in all lessons to enable pupils to drive their own progress and learning by knowing how to be successful themselves.
- Improve standards in writing by:
 - making sure that when pupils' work is marked, points for improvement are more clearly linked to the type of writing they are working on
 - ensuring there are more opportunities for writing and mark-making through play in the Early Years Foundation Stage, thus increasing the children's opportunity to make a better start to learning to write
 - ensuring pupils' handwriting and presentation skills are consistently applied so they all achieve a better standard in their work
 - teaching pupils grammatical skills more effectively to improve the quality of their writing.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' achievement is good as the school rigorously tracks their progress across the school. Consequently, standards in reading and mathematics have improved across the school due to improved teaching and close attention to anyone likely to underachieve.
- Children make good progress after entering the school with skills that are typical for their age. They quickly settle into the school due to close attention to their personal development and by developing their speaking and listening skills well. Although writing is taught in small groups, children have fewer opportunities to develop their mark making and writing skills through play.
- Pupils continue to make good progress across Key Stages 1 and 2. They leave with standards that are broadly above average. Standards in reading and mathematics are higher than those in writing. This is due to weaker handwriting, presentation and grammatical skills, which do not sufficiently accelerate pupils' progress and improve standards. Standards in reading have improved across the school. They are above average and continuing to improve. In the 'national phonics test' pupils did particularly well because of the improved teaching of sounds that letters make (phonics) in ability groups.
- Standards in mathematics have also improved. Pupils are also becoming more adept at applying their knowledge and skills to real-life problems.
- Pupils who are entitled to free school meals also make good progress and reach standards that are in line with similar pupils nationally. The school has been particularly successful in ensuring these pupils make good progress through the use of their 'nurture room', where specific pupils are given support with their learning.
- Those pupils who are supported at school action make good progress due to their needs being well met through good quality teaching. Very skilful teaching assistants provide good support for them as well as for pupils who are disabled or have a special educational need. They mainly work with them in class to ensure that they have an equal opportunity to achieve as well as others.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers use questioning very effectively to promote pupils' learning and progress in lessons. This was seen to good effect in Year 1 where the teacher questioned pupils about how to describe a setting. They discussed their work with partners and this enabled them to accelerate their own progress as they worked independently.
- Lessons are well planned and meet pupils' needs. In a Year 4 writing lesson, pupils made outstanding progress due to the structure of the lesson, the high level of pace and the quality of work that the teacher demanded from the pupils. In some lessons the pace of learning is not good enough to drive faster progress.
- Mathematics teaching has improved significantly. In Year 5, pupils made good progress in their learning as they were challenged to understand mathematical vocabulary related to probability. Their rate of progress accelerated as they were allowed to work independently and solve problems for themselves. In some lessons this is not the case, with learning moving at the pace the teacher dictates rather than allowing pupils time to investigate and solve problems themselves.
- In some lessons teachers use success criteria well to promote pupils' learning and progress. In these lessons, teachers review pupils' learning with them and this accelerates progress.
- A systematic approach to the teaching of reading has been introduced. Teaching in similar ability groups has improved pupils' reading skills. Pupils read widely and often as the school has a dedicated reading session once a week. This has promoted a delight in reading and pupils told inspectors that they love to read.

- Teachers consistently mark work according to the school's marking policy. This does not however, help pupils to improve when writing. Better progress is not made as comments are not clear or focussed enough on the particular type of writing to enable pupils to improve. Consequently, standards in writing are not moving sufficiently fast to the next level.
- Teaching assistants make a major contribution to teaching across the school and work in partnership with teachers. This strengthens learning for all pupils and particularly for those who need specific support. They work flexibly within classes and this is instrumental in increasing pupils' progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep safe. The school ensures they have regular access to sessions regarding keeping safe from a range of agencies, such as the fire brigade and police. They were particularly knowledgeable about safety when using the internet as the school ensures that this is given a high priority when teaching information and communication technology.
- Pupils' behaviour is typically good in this cohesive family school. Relationships across the school are good and everyone feels valued as an individual. Pupils are well mannered and courteous. They support each other as they work and play together well. Pupils say they trust their teachers as they are friendly, patient and listen.
- Pupils say they enjoy coming to school to work and play with their friends. They like their teachers and enjoy the activities that they are given to do. They work well in lessons and try to do their best.
- The school ensures that pupils understand how to deal with bullying. They regularly address how to deal with this through anti-bullying sessions. Pupils say that there is very little bullying. If it does occur they are confident that all staff will help them sort it out.
- Pupils' attendance is above average. The school makes sure pupils are punctual, attend well and maximise their learning time. The parent-support adviser has been instrumental in improving attendance. A range of strategies ensure pupils attend well and are on time.
- Pupils play well at playtimes and behaviour is good, particularly as they move about the school. Taking on responsibility around the school is valued. Monitors for various tasks make a good contribution to the life of the school. This prepares them for the future as responsible citizens.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher's drive and ambition for the school, coupled with high expectations of everyone, have further developed the school and raised standards, particularly in mathematics and reading. She is well supported by a willing staff and a strong leadership team who exhibit a collective responsibility to further improve the school.
- The school is good at checking how well it is doing and its evaluation is accurate. It has identified the relevant things to do to raise standards and improve teaching further. The school acknowledges that, due to changes in staffing, teaching over time is not yet outstanding. Teachers have been appropriately rewarded for their endeavours. They say the training and support they receive has helped them to improve further.
- The school's curriculum is tailor made to meet pupils' needs. It engages them well and enables them to make good progress in all aspects of their learning. The school has spent time revising its curriculum to make sure it provides rich and varied themes that inspire pupils to learn. Visits and visitors to the school enrich the curriculum. As a result pupils enjoy their learning experiences.
- The parent-support adviser provides wide-ranging assistance. Weekly newsletters, a very informative website and regular activities ensure that the school engages with parents well.

- A wide variety of partnerships provide the school with additional support for pupils with specific needs. The strong association with the church enriches the life of the school. Strong links with local schools and with higher education at the Campus Stockton, help to further school improvement.
- The school engages well with the local authority and they have provided good support to this good and ambitious school.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are key to the school's success. Its strong but nurturing approach ensures every pupil achieves their best. An excellent assembly by the headteacher, about miracles, symbolised the school's commitment to pupils' spiritual development.
- The school is diligent in ensuring pupils are kept safe and secure and safeguarding meets requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are keen for all pupils to achieve well within the context of this safe, secure and friendly school. They have a good appreciation of the school's key strengths. They know that writing needs to improve further as they understand the school's data well. They are well trained and have a broad range of skills. These skills are used to good effect to challenge the school to do even better. They have used the pupil premium productively and visit the school regularly to look at pupils' work. They have a good understanding of the quality of the school's teaching and are instrumental in ensuring that good teaching is rewarded and any underperformance tackled.

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	133301
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	403650

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	262
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Don Allday
Headteacher	Val Hall
Date of previous school inspection	27 September 2007
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