

St Mark's RC Primary School

Bardon Close, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear, NE5 4DZ

Inspection dates 19–20 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
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.

- From starting points that are below and often significantly below those typically found, all groups of pupils in all key stages achieve well and make good progress.
- By the end of Year 6, standards overall in reading, writing and mathematics are broadly average. In Year 6 in 2014, an above average proportion of pupils reached the nationally expected Level 4.
- Children get a good start to their learning in the early years as a result of very well-led provision, good teaching and effective support.
- Teaching is good across the school and is sometimes outstanding. Staff know pupils very well and help them to make good gains in their learning. Work is usually well planned to meet pupils' varying needs and abilities.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well. They enjoy coming to school and are keen to learn.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils feel very safe and are cared for well.
- School leaders, managers and governors have a clear view of how well the school is performing and where it can do better. They have worked well together to improve the quality of teaching and raise pupils' achievement, especially in mathematics and reading.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils talk confidently about similarities and differences between themselves and others and regularly show empathy for others. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils' participation in music is excellent. Singing is of a very high standard and a joy to hear.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement in writing is not as good as it is in reading and mathematics. Too few pupils reach the higher levels of attainment in writing by the end of Years' 2 and 6.
- Expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve are not always high enough. The work they are given sometimes lacks challenge.
- Pupils have too few opportunities to write at length.
- Written feedback in pupils' books does not always provide pupils with enough guidance on what they need to do to extend and improve their learning.
- Leaders' checks on pupils' achievements are not yet conducted rigorously enough to ensure that all groups of pupils, such as the most able, are continually making excellent progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 15 lessons, or part-lessons. Four lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with school leaders and with six governors, including the Chair, and vice-chair, of the Governing Body. Inspectors also met a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors met a group of pupils and also spoke informally to other pupils in lessons and during breaks and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors looked at the work pupils were doing in lessons and in their books over time. They listened to pupils read and talked to them about their enjoyment of reading.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and examined a number of documents concerning pupils' current achievement and progress, development plans and information about teachers' performance. They also looked at records relating to behaviour, attendance and safeguarding arrangements. Minutes of governing body meetings were also considered.
- Inspectors took account of 10 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), considered the school's own parental survey and also spoke to parents informally. They also considered 21 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Jonathan Chicken, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Maureen Coleman

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average sized primary school.
- The headteacher of the school is currently the Executive Headteacher of another local primary school.
- Pupils are taught in seven single year-group classes from the Reception to Year 6.
- The school have recently added part-time Nursery provision.
- The large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion that speak English as an additional language is below average, but rising.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium is much higher than average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement even further so that it is outstanding, particularly in writing and for the most able pupils by:
 - making sure all teachers' expectations of what the most able pupils are capable of achieving are consistently high and that work is always challenging enough to enable pupils to reach the higher levels of attainment
 - making sure written feedback in pupils' books consistently provides pupils with well-defined next steps to extend and improve their learning
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to write at length
 - undertaking even more rigorous checks on pupils' achievements to ensure all groups of pupils, especially the most able, are continually making excellent progress.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher provides highly effective and purposeful leadership, and is well supported by the senior leadership team, middle leaders and governors. Together, they have responded well to the areas for improvement identified in the previous inspection, and their actions have improved the quality of teaching and raised pupils' achievement, particularly in mathematics and reading.
- There are effective systems in place for checking how well pupils are doing. Leaders, at all levels, make good use of information about pupils' achievement and progress. Leaders have a clear and accurate view of how well the school is performing and where it could do better. For example, detailed plans are already in place to improve standards in writing. Leaders are aware that teachers' expectations are not always high enough to result in the most rapid progress for pupils, particularly the most able. Plans for improvement are clearly focused on further improving teaching in order to raise achievement.
- School leaders, including middle leaders, check the quality of teaching and learning and evaluate pupils' performance. Any underachievement is addressed by providing pupils with extra help if they need it. As a result, all groups of pupils are making good progress. This shows the school's commitment to making sure all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed. Even so, the checks undertaken on pupils' achievements are not conducted rigorously enough to ensure all groups of pupils, such as the most able, are continually making excellent progress.
- The leadership of teaching is good. Leaders check carefully how well teachers are performing and identify and provide further training or support where needed. This information, along with assessments of pupils' progress is used when making recommendations about teachers' pay. Staff are working increasingly successfully to share best teaching practice within the school and have benefited from training and support from staff within the school as well as from other local schools, including a partner school that is also led by the headteacher.
- The curriculum is well planned, engages pupils effectively in their learning and promotes good behaviour. A very broad range of activities, clubs, trips and visits covering sport, drama, and culture significantly enhance pupils' experiences. Older pupils spoke enthusiastically about a residential outdoor activities visit they had recently been on and other pupils emphasised how much they enjoyed musical activities provided by the school. Through the effective use of additional funding, disadvantaged pupils enjoy similar opportunities as their classmates. The plethora of curricular opportunities supports pupils' good progress.
- Pupils take on responsibility in a variety of roles, for example, as elected members of the school council or as role models who look after younger pupils. The school actively celebrates its growing cultural diversity, and there are strong links with the local church and faith community. The school's values of care, respect and self-worth are well promoted in everyday school life. These values contribute to pupils' exceptionally strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school is using the additional funding to support physical education and sport successfully. Specialist teachers and coaches take lessons, run activities and train staff, and the school participates in a wider range of sports competitions. This is having a very positive impact on pupils' physical well-being and lifestyles.
- The local authority provides light-touch, but effective, support for this good school.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have undertaken training to improve their skills and effectiveness and are well informed about the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' achievement. Governors have a clear understanding of the use and analysis of data about pupils' achievement and progress and how these are linked to the quality of teaching. Governors hold school leaders to account very effectively by asking probing questions about how well the school is doing and where it could do better, and also by setting challenging targets as part of the headteacher's appraisal. Governors make sure pupils' performance is considered when making decisions about teachers' pay.
 - Governors are involved in the day-to-day life of the school in a variety of roles and manage the school's finances effectively. They visit lessons regularly to help them to evaluate the impact of the decisions they make on outcomes for pupils. Governors have a good knowledge of how pupil premium funding and the primary school sport funding are spent and the impact they have. Governors make sure the school meets all its statutory duties, including those related to safeguarding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They consistently demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning. They are attentive in class and are really eager to learn. In a Year 6 music lesson, pupils not only enjoyed themselves while learning to play a brass instrument, but also were also eager to demonstrate the progress that they had made through their individual and class performance. Pupils high levels of engagement and enthusiasm enabled them to learn exceptionally well.
- Pupils speak very positively about behaviour both in class and around the school, such as on the playground or while eating lunch. Children in the Reception class demonstrated excellent table manners and eagerly engaged in conversation about their experiences in school.
- Pupils from all cultures and backgrounds cooperate exceptionally well because the school prioritises the development of their social skills. The school is therefore a welcoming, friendly and supportive community underpinned by a clear Christian ethos. All pupils were very active participants in a whole-school act of worship. Their exceptionally high levels of engagement meant they learned very well and proudly showed off their music and singing skills.
- Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the consistently strong behaviour. Records confirm the few incidences of poor behaviour that do occur are exceptionally well managed and such incidents continue to reduce in frequency.
- Attendance is improving and overall it is now above average. The proportion of pupils who are absent for long periods is also below average. Punctuality is improving, particularly for younger children. The school has clear strategies, such as a pupil mentoring scheme, to bring further improvements.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- All staff have undertaken appropriate child protection training and most are qualified as first aiders. Adults working in school have a clear understanding of the school's policies and know to whom any concerns should be reported.
- The school site is secure and high standards of health and safety are maintained through regular checks of the building and grounds. These checks are audited by governors. Pupils are very well supervised in school and when they leave school to go on trips and visits.
- Pupils understand the different forms that bullying, including those based on prejudices. Pupils are not bullied in school though are confident that should any incidents occur, they will be dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils are extremely aware of the risks associated with new technologies and in particular when using social media and the internet.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is typically good across the school and is improving. Sometimes, teaching is outstanding. This was confirmed by teaching observed during the inspection, the work in pupils' books and the school's records of pupils' progress and the quality of teaching. This teaching enables pupils in all classes to learn well.
- Staff know pupils very well and there are good relationships all round. Staff set work that motivates and engages pupils in their learning. As a result, they are very keen to learn and usually do well.
- Teachers share their good subject knowledge with pupils and usually check on their progress while they learn by asking questions that probe knowledge and understanding. Teaching assistants are used well and they are effective in supporting pupils' learning because the teaching assistants know the pupils and their needs well.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved. Teaching now focuses strongly on developing pupils' basic numeracy skills. Pupils are provided with plenty of opportunities to apply these skills, such as to solving real-life mathematical problems. As a result, pupils now make quicker progress in mathematics, which is evident in their improving standards.
- The school places a high priority on reading. Effective teaching of phonics, together with regular reading in school and encouragement to do so at home ensures pupils develop their skills at a good rate. Pupils are provided with good opportunities to write in different styles, but do not always write at length often enough in a way that helps them improve their standards further.
- Although staff generally have high expectations of what pupils can achieve so they make good progress, sometimes these are not always high enough to result in the most rapid progress for all pupils, particularly the most able. The school have recently started to address this. For example, groups of pupils in Key

Stages 1 and 2 now receive special lessons, which are highly focussed and offer effective challenge. Even so, the most able pupils do not always tackle work that is challenging enough in day-to-day lessons.

- Questioning is usually used well to check and reinforce pupils' knowledge, to deepen their understanding and extend their learning. In English, for example, pupils used mobile devices to answer questions posed by the teacher. This use of technology motivated pupils exceptionally well. They were continually involved and challenged in their learning. Pupils had to think hard about what they were doing, and make timely responses and, as a result, made excellent progress.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly. Staff use praise effectively and often give helpful advice and guidance about the next steps in pupils' learning. Where marking is most effective, it is clear pupils have time to respond to this advice and record their additional thinking as a result of their teacher's prompts. These pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work. However, not all marking is of this quality and the written feedback does not consistently provide pupils with well-defined next steps to extend their learning and deepen their understanding.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils achieve well and make good progress during their time in the school. They join the school from starting points that are below and often significantly below those typically found especially their language and communication skills. Pupils reach standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are broadly average by the end of Year 6.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 1 have varied, but are typically average in reading, writing and mathematics. In 2014, standards fell and were lower than the average. However, these pupils had lower starting points and made good progress from these starting points. Current school information matched with inspection evidence confirms standards in Key Stage 1 are improving over time. Most pupils currently in Year 2, for example, are now on track to reach standards that are average. This represents at least good progress from their lower starting points.
- The overall standards reached by pupils at the end of Year 6 in 2014 were broadly average. An above average proportion of pupils reached the nationally expected Level 4 in reading, writing and in mathematics. This group of pupils made good progress from their below average starting points at the end of Key Stage 1. Inspection evidence, from observing learning in lessons, looking at pupils' work, talking to pupils and examining the school's recent information, shows that all groups of pupils in Key Stage 2 are currently making good progress and achieving well.
- Pupils make good progress in reading because they read regularly both at home and at school and are well taught. Special reading lessons regularly involve the parents of pupils in Key Stage 1. These lessons emphasise the importance that the school places on reading and contribute exceptionally well to reading standards. Key Stage 1 pupils have a good knowledge of phonics (letters and the sounds they make). The proportion of pupils who reached the expected standard in the Year 1 national phonics screening check has improved and was above average in 2014.
- Pupils' achievement in mathematics has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils now have improved numeracy skills and make good progress in mathematics. Pupils frequently use and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills to solve real-life problems, and do this effectively. In Year 6 in 2014, the proportion of pupils making the expected rate or progress and the proportion doing better than this was above average. All pupils reached the nationally expected Level 4 and the proportion reaching Level 5 was close to the national average.
- Pupils achieve well in writing, although the standards they reach and their rate of progress are typically lower than in reading and mathematics. Although most pupils reach the expected Level 4 in writing, only a very small minority reach the higher Level 5.
- Disadvantaged pupils supported by the pupil premium achieve well as a result of effective support. In Year 6 in 2014, the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in reading and mathematics was about one term ahead of other non-disadvantaged pupils in the school. However, in writing they were about one term behind. Compared to non-disadvantaged pupils nationally, their attainment was similar in mathematics, about one term behind in reading and two terms behind in writing. Inspection evidence confirms that the attainment differences between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils are reducing.
- Disabled pupils, those with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress because their needs are accurately identified and they receive good support to help them learn from skilled teachers and teaching assistants.
- The most able pupils are making make good progress and achieve well because they are increasingly being given more difficult work. However, this is not consistent and in some classes their progress is not

always as rapid as it could be because they are not always given work that is challenging enough.

The early years provision

is good

- A large majority of children join the Reception class (and more recently the new Nursery class) with skills and abilities that are below, and in many cases significantly below, those typical for their age, particularly in communication and language. Whatever their starting points, children make good and sometimes excellent progress. The proportion reaching a good level of development is similar to that found nationally, confirming children catch-up quickly. The majority are ready for learning in Year 1. The skills of a minority of children remain lower when they enter Year 1 especially in communication and language.
- The quality of teaching is good. Staff have high expectations and make sure learning is purposeful and well focused. Children play, explore and work hard on activities that challenge them to develop their skills. Children are inquisitive and curious in a variety of indoor and outdoor environments and often use technology and computers to develop their skills. As a result, children develop quickly and make good progress in all areas of learning, working especially hard to improve their language skills.
- During the inspection, older students from a local sixth form supported children in the Reception class to develop their early computing skills and learn about algorithms. Children were highly motivated by the visitors and learned well.
- Staff record and assess children's progress regularly and accurately, and use this information to plan activities to challenge them further. The needs of individual children are met well and all groups of children make good progress.
- There are close working relationships with nursery providers and outside agencies, and very strong links with parents. These have ensured children make a smooth transition into school and are cared for very well.
- Children are well motivated, show good attitudes to learning and behave well in a safe and caring environment. The early years provision makes a strong contribution to children's physical and emotional health, safety and well-being, as well as to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The leadership and management of the early years are highly effective. Leaders have ensured that the new nursery provision enables children's learning to get off to a good start. The early assessments of what children already know and can do are used to good effect to make sure the provision meets children's needs and enable their skills to catch-up quickly.

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	108498
Local authority	Newcastle upon Tyne
Inspection number	448384

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	216
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pat Barnett
Headteacher	Alison Miller
Date of previous school inspection	25 January 2010
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