

St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Harlow

Paringdon Road, Harlow, CM18 7RH

Inspection dates 26–27 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Early years provision		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Drawing effectively on local expertise, the executive headteacher has created a dynamic leadership team. Leaders at all levels confidently contribute initiatives for improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. This has re-energised the work of the school.
- As a result of the good training and individual guidance they have received, teachers have rapidly addressed weaknesses and improved the quality of their work. Teaching is good across the school and is improving strongly.
- Carefully led changes to the teaching of writing and mathematics have significantly improved pupils' learning and progress.
- The decline in achievement has halted. Pupils made good progress to reach much-improved results in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 in 2014. Attainment has risen to be, at least, in line with national standards.
- The curriculum is well planned. Pupils use their improved literacy and numeracy skills effectively to learn in all subjects.
- Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and they feel safe. They behave well around the school and at playtimes. In lessons, they listen attentively to their teachers and are learning to work hard and present their work to an increasingly high standard.
- Procedures for ensuring pupils are safe and appropriate health and safety checks are carried out have been rapidly improved and are now good.
- The interim executive board (IEB) has monitored the work of the school carefully to ensure teaching and achievement improve. Through the diligent leadership of the Chair of the IEB, the school's financial position has stabilised, the premises have improved and good leadership capacity to continue improvement is secure.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In Years 4 and 5, pupils have not yet caught up progress lost due to previously poor teaching.
- The achievement of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage has not improved as rapidly as that of pupils in Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Systems to track the progress made by disabled pupils, those who have special educational needs and disadvantaged pupils have only recently included the level of detail needed to make certain the extra support they receive is successful.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited parts of ten lessons taught by eight teachers. Some of these were joint observations with the executive headteacher. Subsequently she observed the executive headteacher giving feedback to staff about their teaching.
- The inspector met with the executive headteacher, the assistant headteachers, other senior leaders and teachers. She also held meetings with the Chair of the Interim Executive Board, the site manager, a representative of the local authority and the independent adviser supporting the school.
- Meetings were held with two groups of pupils, the inspector listened to some of these pupils read and spoke to others about the books they enjoy.
- A range of documentation was analysed including: improvement planning, information about pupils' achievement, subject leaders' records of their work, behaviour logs, safeguarding documentation, site manager health and safety reviews, records of adviser visits and minutes of the meetings of the interim executive board.
- There were insufficient responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire for parents, to take into account, so the inspector spoke to some parents informally and met with a group of parents before school.

Inspection team

Prue Rayner, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- St James' Church of England VA Primary School is a smaller than average sized primary school.
- Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes to staffing and leadership. The school is due to become an academy next term. An interim executive board replaced the governing body. Its Chair and the executive headteacher are expected to continue to have oversight of the school until at least July 2016. A new head of school has been appointed to take up post after the Easter break 2015.
- The executive headteacher is also the headteacher of another local school, which is working in partnership with St James'.
- Over a third of pupils are from minority ethnic groups and almost a quarter speak English as an additional language.
- One in five pupils in the school are disabled or have special educational needs. This proportion is slightly above average.
- Almost a quarter of pupils are supported by pupil premium funding; this is in line with the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding to support the achievement of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after.
- The school has Early Years Foundation Stage provision in the Reception class which children attend full time.
- In 2014 the school met the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to allocate extra resources to make certain that pupils in Years 4 and 5 sustain accelerated progress and make up the ground they have lost as the result of poor teaching in the past.
- Increase the impact of the new special educational needs coordinator by embedding the systems recently implemented and by:
 - frequently analysing the impact of extra support and intervention on the progress made by disadvantaged pupils and by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, making rapid changes to improve progress where necessary
 - continuing to improve the planning and work of all the learning support assistants so that the pupils they work with make good progress as a result.
- Improve the achievement of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - embedding the rigorous assessment and planning implemented by the new teacher
 - providing children with more freedom to choose learning opportunities
 - improving the condition of the outdoor learning space to extend the range of learning activities.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher is rigorous and demanding in her drive to improve the school. Clear expectations are set for improving the quality of teaching, raising pupils' achievement and establishing appropriate safeguarding procedures. The staff team have grown and flourished professionally as a result of well-planned training and support. Where necessary, decisive actions have addressed underperformance.
- The assistant headteachers respond enthusiastically to the challenges they are set. As a result, they are each providing sharply focused leadership of a key stage, together with either English or mathematics. Through observing teaching and scrutinising pupils' work, they have built up an excellent understanding of the core elements of the school's work. As a result they have led some significant changes to teaching and learning resulting in major improvements in pupils' achievement.
- Other subject leaders have received support to develop their roles well. They are using analyses of pupils' achievement in their subject to prioritise necessary improvements. Staff skills in teaching different subjects are evaluated and training planned to ensure their expertise improves. For example, modelling of gymnastics teaching is taking place because staff identified this as an area in which they lack confidence.
- A key strength in the schools' work is the quality and regularity of the assessment of pupils' learning and the use of this information to track pupils' progress and identify when they fall behind. The assessment leader is rigorous in her analysis; this enables her to decide with staff when pupils need extra support and to inform other leaders in detail about how well pupils and staff are performing.
- Working with the partner school, staff have reorganised how the curriculum is planned and taught. Subjects are meaningfully linked and pupils develop their improving literacy and mathematical skills in a range of contexts. For example, Year 6 pupils recorded observations about Victorian London for their history work while working on a text for their literacy lesson. The seven-year plan for integrating subjects in this way is making learning more exciting and also contributing effectively to pupils' social and cultural development and their understanding of life in modern British, democratic society.
- The new special educational needs coordinator has fully reviewed how the school meets the needs of its most vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils. A clear system for recording and analysing pupils' starting points is now in place. Although recording of the difference extra support, including the pupil premium, is making to pupils' achievement is at an early stage, governors and leaders now have access to the information they need. However, this system is not yet fully embedded in practice. Pupils are starting to receive more equal opportunities to succeed and leaders' understanding of how well resources are used to make a difference to the learning of all is improving.
- The leader of physical education has planned the use of the primary sports funding well; the profile of sport has been raised and pupils have increased opportunities to participate in competitions. Better, safe equipment and increased teaching expertise are ensuring that pupils are making improved progress in learning key skills. A short dance sequence inspired by 'water' a Year 5 class performed showed how effectively physical education is being linked to other aspects of the curriculum.
- The local authority brokered the support of the executive headteacher and implemented an interim executive board following the last inspection. Both of these actions have been influential in improving the school. Advisers have continued to provide help that recognises the strengths of the collaborative work developed with the partner school and the strongly positive impact of the externally sourced improvement adviser.
- The school meets its statutory duties for the safeguarding and safety of pupils.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Membership of the interim executive board includes representatives of the diocese and the local

authority. This arrangement ensures that essential resources and support are available to bring about the significant improvements required.

- The Chair of the Interim Executive Board has worked relentlessly to address the muddled financial position of the school and to ensure that the school's facilities are safe and fit for purpose. As a result, major improvements to staffing have been made, the school environment is considerably improved and plans are in place to address the remaining issues.
- Procedures are in place to enable members to understand how well teaching is improving and to support leaders' actions in management of staff performance where necessary, and also to reward success with pay.
- Because leaders at all levels are fulfilling their responsibilities effectively, members of the interim executive board have a good overview of the achievement of pupils from data on progress and attainment and of where improvement is still needed. Work to analyse the impact of extra resources on the progress made by disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils is ongoing and information being produced this term is intended to enable members of the board to ensure that these are used to good effect.
- The board has recently appointed a new head of school who is currently working at the executive headteacher's school. This appointment increases leadership capacity and ensures continuity of expectation.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are lively as they move around school. However, they understand the new school rules and show respect for each other and for the adults who work with them. Recording of the incidences of behaviour that do not meet expectations shows that they are reducing. Pupils know the system of sanctions and rewards; they say that the executive headteacher involves parents and will take decisive action if a pupil's behaviour does not improve quickly.
- Pupils say they enjoy the ways their learning links together. This interests them and, as a result, they concentrate well and in most classes work hard. They want to succeed and as teaching has improved are developing greater persistence when they find their work challenging.
- Attendance has improved to above the national average. An attendance officer visits families to provide support where pupils' attendance is a concern and weekly class awards keep the profile of good attendance high. Pupils say they like coming to school and that they want to achieve well.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. The work of the site manager from the partner school ensures that the premises meet health and safety requirements and further improvements are planned for as and when finances allow.
- Procedures for checking staff are not barred from working with children are appropriate and references for new appointees are followed up. Safeguarding training covering school procedures and consideration of the wider risks to pupils are provided regularly for all staff. During the inspection, senior leaders demonstrated they know and effectively use procedures for referral to wider agencies to ensure pupils are safe.
- Pupils say there used to be 'quite a lot' of bullying at playtimes but that now there is little or none. They say they are taught about the different forms of bullying and understand it can be physical or verbal. Older pupils understand it can sometimes be 'underhand' and know it is important to tell an adult if it happens. They say their teachers will address a problem if it arises.

The quality of teaching is good

- Because expectations are made clear and teachers have worked in productive partnership with staff at the partner school, teaching has improved. Working with other leaders, the school improvement adviser

has also provided detailed and focused feedback and support to staff, which has helped them develop their practice quickly.

- In all classes, work is planned to meet the range of pupils' abilities although the level of challenge for the most able is, occasionally, not high enough. Teachers use their knowledge of how well pupils are doing to provide extra resources where necessary to help pupils better understand what they are doing. For example, in a Year 5 mathematics lesson, number-line thermometers helped pupils who found negative numbers challenging to make progress in their learning. Nevertheless, additional resources continue to be needed to ensure Years 4 and 5 pupils maintain their more rapid progress.
- The teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) has been completely reorganised to ensure that any gaps in pupils' learning to read are filled. Teachers set clear targets for 'catch up' in different groups and where these are not quickly met extra support, often on a one-to-one basis, is initiated. Very high expectations are ensuring that previously weak progress is addressed from Reception through to Year 4. Similarly, spelling is being taught more rigorously and pupils know that 'lazy' spelling is now unacceptable.
- Learning support assistants receive training in essential elements of mathematics and literacy – for example, phonics. As a result, their support in some lessons helps to move pupils' learning on. In others, assistants' work is less effective. This is either because their work is not well planned, or because pupils are supported to do the same as others are doing rather than being given help at the right level.
- Pupils make good progress in writing because teachers plan sequences of work that build pupils' vocabulary and develop their understanding of the important features of the kind of text they will be working on. As a result, pupils know what is expected and use this knowledge and a richer range of words and sentence structures to produce writing that is detailed, descriptive and often lively.
- Effective training has improved teachers' mathematics subject knowledge. Essential elements of number, for example, place value, are taught in a way that supports pupils to understand and use key skills better. Teachers' expectations of what pupils know and can do in mathematics are higher. There is good evidence to demonstrate that pupils use new practical resources regularly and meaningfully to develop their understanding well.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and in line with agreed school policy. Pupils receive good feedback on their work and know what they have done well and what the next steps or improvements are. In many books, there are fine examples of this process of helping pupils to understand their learning and address misconceptions. Pupils say marking and feedback make a difference to their progress and that they remember aspects they have been asked to improve when they use them again.
- Although illness and changes in staff might have slowed progress in improving teaching, they have not been allowed to do so. Teachers have worked with the partner school staff determinedly to share practice that is working successfully, to review pupils' work from across the schools together, and to identify how to improve practice. As a result, any less-effective performance is collaboratively identified and individual staff are clear about whether they are meeting the high standards expected.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Because staff have worked tirelessly to fill gaps and accelerate progress, achievement has improved across the school, irrespective of pupils' ethnic heritages or confidence in speaking English. At the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, results in reading, writing and mathematics were, at least, in line with those attained nationally. For the first time, some pupils in Year 6 in the national tests in 2014 attained Level 6 in writing, spelling, punctuation and grammar and mathematics.
- By the end of Year 6 too, pupils had made good progress from below-average starting points. The proportion making expected progress in reading, writing and mathematics was ahead of national performance. More pupils made better-than-expected progress in mathematics than the national

proportion, which reflects the improved teaching. The proportion of pupils making better-than-expected progress in reading and writing was close to the national picture.

- Because of the high turnover in teaching staff, results reached at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2014 were below those achieved nationally. A smaller proportion of pupils reached an overall good level of development. In particular, children made less progress in developing reading and writing, and speaking and listening skills. Similarly, fewer pupils than nationally reached the expected standard in the phonics screening check at the end of Year 1.
- Actions being taken to improve early literacy skills are bringing about improvement quickly. Work in books in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in Years 1 and 2 shows that pupils are making improved progress in their writing as a result of tightly focused teaching and well-planned extra support. By the end of Year 2 in 2014, almost all pupils caught up to the expected standard in phonics. Pupils use their phonic knowledge to read and spell words accurately; some pupils are still developing the confidence to use these skills when reading aloud.
- Support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs has been reshaped and is monitored in greater detail. A smaller number of pupils than previously are receiving extra support because whole-class teaching has improved. Analysis of pupils' work shows that because teachers have a better understanding of the barriers to these pupils' learning, they are increasingly well supported to make good progress from their starting points.
- In 2014, because pupils' progress was reviewed more rigorously and teaching improved, disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium made good progress. They were about a term behind other pupils in the school in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of Year 6 in 2014, and behind all pupils nationally to a similar extent.
- The school's most-able pupils attain well. The proportion reaching higher levels at the end of Key Stage 1 and 2 is in line with national attainment. In Year 6 in 2014, almost all pupils who attained high standards at the end of Key Stage 1 sustained above-average results. In mathematics, a greater proportion than nationally made better-than-expected progress to reach the higher Level 6.
- Standards of presentation and handwriting have improved across the school. From Reception, pupils are taught to hold their pencils properly, form their letters correctly and take pride in how they set out their work.

The early years provision

requires improvement

- The majority of children start in the Reception class with skills and abilities below those typical for their age in speaking and listening in English. Outcomes have been below those expected in the past three years and in 2014, although the proportion of children reaching a good level of development increased, a significant proportion still underachieved. Despite leaders' focus on improving the quality of teaching, improvements stalled because there were too many staffing changes and children were not well enough prepared to start Year 1.
- Changes have been made this year. A new permanent, experienced teacher is leading the class and the tasks and activities planned for children are extending their experiences and supporting them to develop core reading, writing and mathematical skills well. For example, all children were seen enthusiastically counting and ordering numbers of cars the teacher was moving between garages in an early-morning mathematics lesson. Because learning was interesting and relevant, the children made good progress in recognising numbers and in understanding simple addition and subtraction.
- Children's learning is continually assessed as they participate in the range of activities provided. Adults' responses ensure children are building well on what they know. Learning journals show pupils are making improved progress and there is good evidence already of their developing writing skills.

- To support the good development of early literacy skills this year, phonics teaching is better planned to build rapidly on the progress children make in learning new sounds. A range of opportunities for writing are available to encourage more reluctant writers and extra support is planned for the development of early numeracy skills.

- Wider activities the children undertake are meaningfully linked to stories or topics they are learning about. Because so much focus is currently given to teaching key skills, there are not enough creative activities for the children to choose and pursue, and the outdoor area, although developed, cannot be used in inclement weather. The children are kept safe in the Reception areas.

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	115172
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	447404

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	191
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	David Ives
Headteacher (Executive Headteacher)	Mary Evans
Date of previous school inspection	9 July 2013
Telephone number	01279 432459
Email address	office@stjames-ceap-harlow.essex.sch.uk

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