

St Margaret Clitherow Roman Catholic Primary School

Monkswood Lane, (Off Monkswood Way), Stevenage, SG2 8QJ

Inspection dates

20–21 March 2013

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Pupils make rapid progress because they are very keen to learn, and because the teaching is highly effective.
- Standards have remained consistently well above average in English and mathematics. Reading standards are particularly high.
- The work pupils do is very well matched to their needs. Teachers and teaching assistants keep a close check on how well pupils understand what they are doing, and quickly offer support when it is needed.
- The approaches used to support different groups of pupils are carefully thought out and then skilfully implemented, with frequent checks to make sure they are effective.
- Teachers make excellent use of the various outdoor areas for learning that have been set up, including an outdoor classroom.
- Teachers have high expectations for pupils' work and behaviour, and pupils rise to these.
- Just occasionally, the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make) does not fully help older pupils to spell complex words.
- Pupils' highly positive attitudes are a very important factor in their successful learning. They listen closely to instructions, offer their own insights, and check their work carefully.
- The recent introduction of a programme to help pupils think about their learning is proving highly successful and they become resilient learners, looking for ways to overcome barriers for themselves.
- The exciting curriculum, strong links with the community and church, and the emphasis on personal faith and beliefs make excellent contributions to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
- Behaviour is excellent. Pupils get along very well and enjoy school, accepting one another's different views or beliefs.
- Pupils feel very safe at school and in the wider world, because they are well trained about how they can stay safe and show positive attitudes.
- Senior leaders provide excellent role models for the highest standards in teaching. They help all teachers to know how to promote the very best learning in each lesson.
- Governors provide excellent levels of support and challenge, and, together with senior leaders, make sure that the school meets all national requirements for children's education.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 19 lessons or parts of lessons taught by 11 teachers, as well as sessions for small groups of pupils or individuals, led by teaching assistants. Some of these observations were carried out together with senior leaders.
- The inspectors met with senior leaders, staff and groups of pupils. The lead inspector met with members of the governing body and with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors also spoke to pupils informally, looked at their work during lessons and in their books, and listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors looked at the school’s data about the progress and attainment of pupils, and reviewed its evaluation of how well pupils are doing. They looked at a wide range of documents provided by the school to support this, as well as its development plans, records about checking the quality of teaching, policies and procedures, and records about the behaviour and safety of pupils.

Inspection team

Andrew Saunders, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Liz Kissane

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school serving a wide area of Stevenage. There is one class in each year group.
- The majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from a wide range of other minority ethnic backgrounds is above average. Slightly more pupils than average speak English as an additional language. Some of these pupils are at the early stages of learning English when they join the school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- Fewer pupils than average are supported by the pupil premium, which is additional government funding to help certain groups of pupils. In this school it applies only to pupils who are known to have been eligible for free school meals.
- Since the last inspection, the deputy headteacher has been promoted to headteacher and a new deputy headteacher has been appointed.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase pupils' confidence and accuracy in spelling independently the high level of vocabulary they use, by making sure that pupils of all abilities and ages get the right support when teaching them about phonics.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- When they join the school in the nursery class, children typically have skills and knowledge in line with those expected for their age, although some children's skills are considerably below the levels expected. They make a good start to their learning. Progress accelerates in the Reception class and continues to gather pace as pupils mature and increasingly take more responsibility for their own learning.
- By the end of Year 6, the school's information and the work seen in their books and lessons show that they are working well above the levels expected nationally. In some cases they are up to two years ahead, particularly in mathematics. All pupils make at least the progress expected nationally, and a much higher proportion than usual make more progress, in both English and mathematics.
- Pupils are confident readers, and reach exceptionally high standards in reading. They also do very well in other subjects, including science, because of the practical tasks they are given to do and the high quality of teaching. The more-able pupils are helped to reach well above the levels expected for their age because they are given challenging work to do.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are extremely well supported. The specific issues they face are carefully considered and support is then closely matched to their needs so they make rapid progress and often catch up with the other pupils.
- Pupils who have speech and language difficulties are helped to become much more confident in their speaking, particularly because of the range of technologies the school uses to support them, such as recording microphones and the sound system in each classroom. These systems also help all pupils to become confident when reading aloud to the class, because they can be easily heard.
- Pupils who join the school speaking English as an additional language are particularly well supported and they, too, make exceptional progress. Those at the early stages of learning English quickly develop listening and speaking skills and their progress accelerates very rapidly.
- Pupils who are supported by the pupil premium get extra help and guidance from teaching assistants, have opportunities to speak to a highly-trained teaching assistant about their emotional well-being, and get additional teaching in the areas where they particularly need it. As a result, they make similarly rapid progress to other pupils in the school in English and mathematics. The very small number of eligible pupils who took the 2012 test means that it is not statistically meaningful to compare their attainment to that of similar pupils nationally.
- Regular use of readily accessible, high-quality information and communication technology (ICT) resources means that pupils have exceptional computer skills and are developing great confidence in using a wide range of software to support their learning.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Leaders at all levels provide excellent support for all staff to help them develop the best ways of making sure pupils' learning is highly effective. Teachers share ideas and look for the best practice and research about learning in other schools to improve their skills.

- Lessons are carefully planned using all the information teachers have about the needs of different groups of pupils, the interests pupils express, and how well they have learnt in the previous lesson. The common format for planning used by teachers helps to make sure pupils all have a similarly positive experience of lessons. It also helps teachers to be flexible about what happens in a particular lesson, by responding to how quickly pupils grasp the skills they are learning.
- Teachers involve pupils in deciding what they need to do next in their learning, through a consistent approach to setting targets and deciding how they will know if they have succeeded in their learning each lesson. Teaching assistants are also highly skilled at asking probing questions to check how well pupils have understood, while promoting pupils' independence. Adults have very high expectations of what pupils are capable of.
- Teachers make helpful comments when they mark pupils' books, following an agreed approach which means pupils know what they need to work on. Pupils frequently respond to these comments, and this helps them to reinforce what they have learnt in each lesson.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs benefit from well-planned support. The teaching assistants and teachers make sure these pupils get extra input when they need it, both in small groups alongside the lessons and during lessons. Pupils who are learning to speak English as an additional language get help from well-trained teaching assistants.
- Teachers are very skilled at using the high-quality ICT resources available. They are exploring how to best use touch-screen tablet computers of various sizes to capture information about how well pupils are doing, and to give pupils instant access to research on the internet. Together with the pupils, particularly those in Year 6, they are looking at innovative ways to use different software to promote and enhance learning. This is proving highly successful and the school is leading the way for other schools in the area and more widely.
- Parents said, 'Teaching is fantastic.' They recognise that their children love learning because of the enthusiasm of all the staff, and the way the topics pupils study are taught within such interesting contexts. There are many opportunities for parents to find out more about how the school approaches particular aspects, such as the new programme to help pupils think deeply about their learning, and these workshops are well attended.
- The teaching of phonics is well structured for younger pupils and for any pupils who need to catch up in their reading. This means that pupils quickly become confident readers. However, it is not always as effective for older pupils. This means that some pupils are not as confident in using these skills to help them spell more complicated and ambitious words accurately.
- Teachers frequently use the various outdoor areas for learning across all the topics pupils study. This often helps the pupils to put their learning into context so that they understand why it is important in the wider world. It also develops their understanding of the natural environment around them.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils are immensely proud of their school. Some of the words they use to describe it are, 'wonderful', 'fabulous', and 'impeccable'. They like being at school because there are so many interesting things to do. Their attendance is high.

- In lessons, pupils are highly cooperative with the adults and each other, showing a mature insight into their own responsibilities that enables great learning to take place. They think deeply about the work they are doing and quickly consider how they could improve it. They regularly give each other thoughtful feedback, and listen carefully to each other's contributions.
- Pupils join in with the many activities available and feel happy to suggest new ideas, which adults take on board. For example, the Wiggly Path club, set up by younger pupils initially, is very popular and demonstrates pupils' immense concern for the natural environment immediately around them.
- Around school and when on trips or visits, pupils are very polite, aware of each other's needs, and respectful of the rights of others. They willingly help others to sort out any issues, or make sure that everyone is involved in games on the playground.
- Pupils say that bullying is very rare in their school; they do not recall it happening. They say that if anyone falls out with a friend, they have a number of ways of sorting it out, only needing the help of adults occasionally. They know that any racism will be challenged and will not tolerate it themselves. They feel that the school does a lot to make sure every pupil has equal opportunities and they help to make sure all pupils feel included.
- Good training opportunities mean that pupils are confident about how to keep themselves safe in different situations, including around water, on the roads, and when using the internet.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Since being promoted, the headteacher has continued the school's efforts to maintain the highest standards, and further improve teaching. The exceptionally strong senior leadership team has developed a clear vision for making this an extraordinary school, and made sure that this is shared widely across the school community.
 - The pupils have wide-ranging and rich opportunities to learn new skills and develop their knowledge, within exciting topics that they help to choose. Practical tasks and interesting projects mean they enjoy taking their learning further beyond lessons, and use their skills in very different scenarios. For example, they love writing and find some interesting ways to do more of it, such as cooperating to write a book about the Olympics in their free time.
 - Extensive information is collected about how well pupils are doing and this is analysed carefully to check all groups of pupils and individuals are helped to make rapid progress. Any pupil at risk of falling behind is quickly identified so that appropriate support can quickly be provided. These approaches are carefully evaluated to check that they make a difference.
 - Strategies to develop the independence of pupils, so that they take more responsibility for their learning, have been carefully considered. Extensive training has ensured that all adults and parents very clearly understand the school's approach. Pupils readily think about how they can be resilient, resourceful, and reflect on their learning. Pupils also consider how they can work together to make their learning effective.
 - The senior leaders and the governors have consulted all members of the school community to find out what would make this the 'dream school'. This has formed the basis of ambitious plans for the future, with many aspects already in place or being developed.
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- Procedures for keeping pupils safe are very thorough and all adults receive frequent training to make sure they are well aware of their responsibilities in this respect. Support for pupils' mental health is excellent and pupils feel they can easily talk to the specially-trained adults, or their teachers, if they feel worried about anything. The emphasis on emotional well-being means that pupils are encouraged and supported to resolve their own problems.
 - There is a strong emphasis on giving pupils plenty of opportunities to reflect on the more profound aspects of their lives, including their beliefs and faiths. Together with the exciting opportunities to study interesting topics through the curriculum, and many opportunities to participate in music, drama and other social activities, this means that their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptionally well promoted. The excellent links with other schools mean pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.
 - The local authority has helped to check that the school's views about its work are accurate, but provides appropriately 'light-touch' support for this outstanding school. It uses the school as an exemplar in leading anti-bullying workshops, the use of the outdoor environment to promote learning, and developing outstanding teaching.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors work with the senior leaders to make sure that all members of the school community have the opportunity to shine and develop. They challenge leaders about the school's performance, asking probing questions to identify any issues early. They are confident in doing this because of the training they have undertaken and their highly strategic vision for the school. Together with senior leaders they have made sure that the quality of teaching is considered carefully when reviewing the level of teachers' pay so that the best teaching is rewarded. They hold the school to account for how the pupil premium funding is spent, checking that it is making a difference for these pupils. Governors make sure that teachers and other adults are well trained and understand their responsibilities around keeping pupils safe, and that all policies and procedures meet the latest national requirements.
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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	117474
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	403326

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	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Sloan
Headteacher	Jonathan White
Date of previous school inspection	26 February 2008
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