

Tonwell St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Ware Road, Tonwell, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 0HN

Inspection dates

20–21 September 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The school has declined since it was inspected in September 2011. The rate of progress of pupils in Years 3 to 6 is no longer good because teaching varies too much in quality.
- Expectations of what older pupils can achieve are too low and pupils do not do well enough across subjects. Writing skills are not applied well.
- At key stage 2, the progress of the most able pupils is slow and they underachieve.
- The role of subject leaders is underdeveloped. The quality of curriculum planning and teaching in subjects other than English and mathematics is not checked well enough.
- The high turnover of staff and temporary appointments have led to discontinuity in pupils' learning.
- Until very recently, aspects of leadership were weak. The management of staff performance did not improve practice quickly enough.
- Governors received insufficient information about the school's work in the last academic year. This limited their ability to hold leaders to account.
- Communication with parents is not as effective as it could be. Parents do not get enough information on the curriculum and on their children's achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has already made her mark. Parents praise her dedication and stamina. Staff welcome her clear sense of direction.
- The school is improving. Leaders' strong determination is making a positive difference to pupils' achievement.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good in the early years and in the mixed-age Year 1/2 class.
- Provision in the early years is good. Children learn in an area that is well equipped. They develop their skills through a series of motivating activities. Staff exploit their eagerness to learn fully.
- Behaviour is good. Pupils are kind to each other. Pupils and parents say that pupils feel safe at school.
- Teaching assistants work well with class teachers to help pupils who have additional needs.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - developing the role of subject leaders so that they contribute to raising standards across all subjects
 - planning a richer and more demanding curriculum, particularly for most-able pupils, to help pupils make faster progress
 - improving the skills of governors so that they know how to hold the school to account.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning at key stage 2 by:
 - giving staff opportunity to share good practice and to reflect on their teaching
 - providing staff with clear guidance on how to make their teaching more effective
 - raising staff's expectation of what pupils can achieve, particularly in writing.
- Improve communication with parents by:
 - providing them with accurate information about their children's progress
 - improving the content of the school's website.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because the recently appointed headteacher, although demonstrating good capacity to improve the school, has not yet had sufficient time to ensure that pupils in all classes achieve equally well.
- The school has had difficulty recruiting teachers. The many staff changes have led to some lack of continuity in the leadership of subjects. This means that the quality of the curriculum and the way it is planned are not evaluated well enough to raise standards.
- In the past year, the strategies to improve the quality of teaching at key stage 2 have been ineffective. The appraisal process was not used well enough to meet staff's training needs. A new system to manage the performance of staff is being implemented but it is too recent to have secured good teaching in all classes.
- The headteacher is very effectively supported by the deputy headteacher. Together they form a cohesive leadership team. They have an accurate knowledge of the improvements that are required and have clear strategies to address the weaknesses.
- The parents who spoke to inspectors, sent additional comments, or completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, are very supportive of the new headteacher and recognise the improvements that have already been made at the beginning of this year.
- The deputy headteacher is a good role model for staff. She managed the school well during the absence of the previous headteacher. She leads key stage 1 effectively and is a good mentor for the newly qualified teacher in the early years. As a result, provision and teaching in the early years are good.
- Current staff are very pleased about recent developments at the school. Successes include an improved timetable, weekly monitoring of teaching and better sharing of effective practice. Staff say that they receive precise advice about how to improve. The headteacher has a clear schedule for coaching and training of staff. This programme is in its early stage of implementation and its full impact is unproven.
- The curriculum meets the needs of the children well in the early years and in the Year 1/2 class. The school provides the full range of subjects at key stage 2 but the broad themes are not planned well enough to ensure progression. This means that coverage of topics is too superficial. It does not deepen pupils' understanding within and across years. This is particularly the case in computing, science and personal, social and health education.
- In some respects pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, for instance, when using the internet. They are taught the values of kindness, respect and tolerance, and understand how to value the opinions and faiths of others. Pupils understand that discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. However, some British values, such as democracy, freedom of expression and the rule of law, are not promoted well enough. Pupils do not have the necessary skills or opportunities to debate national and world issues or explain their points of view through subjects such as history, geography and the arts.

- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is effective. The range of clubs that are provided are well attended. Activities capture the interest of the pupils, particularly those planned for the forest school. Visitors to the school and trips to places of interest complement these themes effectively.
- The impact of pupil premium funding on pupils' achievement is monitored effectively. Senior leaders know pupils well and make sure that they are receiving the support they need.
- The primary physical education and sport funding is used to provide a range of after-school clubs. Pupils also take part in multi-sport events although opportunities to meet larger teams and compete in high-profile events are too infrequent. The headteacher has already made contact with local schools to enhance this aspect of pupils' personal development.
- At the time of the inspection, the school's website did not meet requirements. The preparatory work indicates that this will be remedied very soon.
- The local authority provides effective support and challenge to the school. The headteacher has access to useful networks for advice and guidance. The newly qualified teacher is joining local groups to develop her practice further. Over time, the local authority improvement partner evaluated the school accurately. The resultant reports identified clearly that improvements were required. The report on the provision for children looked after was particularly informative. It is unfortunate that governors are not aware of its content.

Governance of the school

- Governors do not have an accurate view of the school's performance and believe the school to be a good school. In previous academic years, they did not check whether appraisal of staff was effective, and progression through the salary scale points was not based on reliable evidence.
- Governors make regular visits to the school. Their view of pupils' behaviour and welfare is accurate. However, last year in particular, they did not know enough about the school's slipping standards. They were unaware of the issues raised by the local authority.
- Governors are highly committed. They are responding well to the significant change in the way senior leaders now work with them.
- Governors understand what pupil premium funding is spent on and they know how well this money is helping disadvantaged pupils. The way they check the impact of the primary physical education and sport funding requires consolidation.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All relevant policies are up to date and meet the requirements of most-recent guidance. Staff demonstrate very clearly that it is everyone's responsibility to create a safe culture in the school. The headteacher, who is the designated safeguarding lead, knows what to do to report pupils who are missing from education.
- The staff's understanding of the school's procedures and policies ensure that pupils are safe. Pupils say that they feel safe when they are at school.

- Senior leaders are approachable and highly visible around the school. Parents and pupils know that any concerns they have will be addressed promptly.
- All staff have received training relating to keeping pupils safe, including online safety. The frequent updates to staff mean that all have a clear understanding of what actions they must take should they have safeguarding concerns about a pupil.
- Where safeguarding concerns do arise, the school works closely with the local authority and relevant agencies to support the pupils concerned.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning is not consistently good. It is effective in improving pupils' outcomes in the early years and in the Year 1/2 class. It is not promoting good standards at key stage 2 across subjects.
- In Years 3 to 6, teaching over time has not ensured that pupils made good progress. The monitoring of teaching has been ineffective and training for key stage 2 staff was insufficient. However, improving the quality of teaching is a key priority of the current school development plan. Senior leaders have the necessary skills and expertise to support staff in meeting their targets.
- Teaching is effective when pupils know exactly what they have to learn, topics are exciting, and teachers use good technical language and show pupils how they can refine their work. This successful practice was seen in the early years and key stage 1. In these classes, pupils demonstrated good attitudes to their learning and were making good progress. The teaching of phonics is effective. What is learned is consolidated through practical activities.
- Despite the commitment of staff, the planning of topics to help older pupils make rapid progress is weak. Teachers do not use lesson time well enough and time is spent on easy tasks, such as cutting pictures or drawing instead of explaining scientific or world phenomena. Teachers too readily accept single-word answers. In speaking, pupils are not challenged enough to summarise their thinking and speak to an audience clearly.
- Work in books at key stage 2 shows that teachers' expectations are too low. The frequent use of worksheets limits what pupils write and the quality of pupils' spelling and handwriting suffers. Most-able pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to explain their ideas at length or discover things for themselves. Investigations in science, research projects in design and technology, or work in computing are too basic and do not prepare pupils well enough for the demands of secondary education.
- Senior leaders are beginning to make a difference to the quality of teaching at key stage 2. The teaching of mathematics is given high priority and teachers are working hard to improve their practice. The expertise of the local authority adviser is improving the teaching of mental strategies and reasoning. In English and mathematics, teachers are applying the revised marking and assessment policy well.
- The new reading comprehension sessions are helping pupils access more complicated texts. The small classes foster good relationships. Teachers are always willing to help when pupils are stuck. Some specialist teaching is effective such as in physical education. The headteacher is setting up new provision for the teaching of music.

- Communication between class teachers and teaching assistants is good. Teaching assistants provide effective support for low-attaining pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. A particularly good example of effective work was observed when the speech and language therapist demonstrated her skills to the teaching assistant who was then more confident in applying these techniques to her daily work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Older pupils are not demonstrating the skills of effective learners. They rely heavily on their teachers for support. They comply with what teachers ask of them but rarely find things out by themselves or ask questions to deepen their knowledge. They lack perseverance.
- Younger pupils are inquisitive and curious about discovering new things. They love competing, such as when finding worms in the forest area. They do not give up when work is too hard.
- Pupils know how to keep safe. They understand how to use modern technology safely. Pupils enjoy physical activities and sporting events. They are very active at playtime. This improves their health and general well-being.
- Pupils are aware of different types of bullying and incidents are rare. Pupils say that they have no hesitation telling an adult if they need help.
- Parents who responded to Parent View and spoke to the inspector said that they are very happy with behaviour and that their children are very safe. They appreciate the presence of senior leaders welcoming families at the beginning of the school day.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- In lessons, pupils are generally well behaved, and they listen attentively to adults and to each other. The school is a calm and orderly environment.
- In the early years, behaviour is also good. The children have only been in school for three weeks and they are already well versed in all the school's routines. They share toys and respond well to instructions.
- Most pupils want to attend school and attendance matches the national average. The school is working well with families when poor attendance is having a negative impact on pupils' achievement and welfare.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress varies too much between classes. It is good in the early years and in the Year 1/2 class but insufficient in the other groups. This means that older pupils are not prepared well for transition to the secondary schools. In July 2016, there were too few pupils in Year 6 to report on their results.

- Children start school with varied skills and experiences. By the time they reach the end of Reception they are broadly as expected at this age. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 make good progress and outcomes are better than average at the end of Year 2. Results have historically been quite good at that age. In 2015, over half of pupils achieved the higher level. Results for 2016 cannot be compared with previous years but pupils did well.
- Pupils' knowledge of phonics is good. Teachers use a common approach across early years and key stage 1 to help pupils read and write. The number of Year 1 pupils taking the national phonics screening check is too low for any valid analysis of trends but, in 2016, almost all met the expected level. Pupils are methodically taught new skills and then encouraged to practise them in their everyday work. Pupils who read to the inspector did so fluently. They could explain the meaning of the stories and read with correct intonation.
- Writing skills are well practised at key stage 1 across subjects. For example, pupils were proud to show their work when using the past tense. Many could recognise irregular verbs and use them correctly in full sentences. Numeracy skills are reinforced through practical activities from a young age. Across the school, improvement in the teaching of mathematics, under the specialist leadership of the headteacher, is notable.
- Considering that pupils enter Year 3 with skills that are at least as expected for their age, progress is too slow from then on. In Years 3 to 6, speaking skills are not well developed. The quality of handwriting and the accuracy of spelling are not good enough.
- Most-able pupils underachieve and tend to produce very short answers. Pupils' exercise books do not show evidence of extended and detailed writing. Work in science, in particular, is weak with limited writing-up of experiments or sophisticated conclusions. Outcomes in computing do not match pupils' potential in this subject.
- Throughout the school, pupils supported by the pupil premium are doing well as they receive individual attention to fill any gaps in their knowledge. On a day-to-day basis, teachers and teaching assistants check that plans are adapted to meet changing needs. The small number of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do well in the activities they are given. Their progress is checked frequently. They were observed learning well with their classmates who often helped them to read or to correct their writing.

Early years provision

Good

- Early years provision is better than in the rest of the school because teaching is good, children make good progress and the activities on offer stimulate their appetite for learning. The large outdoor space and the forest area offer a very good learning environment.
- Children enter Nursery with knowledge, understanding and skills that are typical for their age. They make good progress and, by the time they leave Reception, children reach a good level of development. Children are well prepared to start Year 1.

- The new teacher in charge of the early years has already improved the outdoor and indoor provision significantly. With the support of senior leaders, the early years is well led and managed. Staff make sure that children are safe. As a result, children grow in confidence and relate well to adults and other children.
- Activities are well organised and resources are used effectively. Staff plan exciting activities for the children. For example, children were very seriously considering how to use their pennies to buy fruit at the snack shop. Children develop a love of reading at an early age. They were observed reading with the teaching assistant and could clearly explain the meaning of the pictures in the story.
- The monitoring and assessment of children's progress is developing. Further work is required to liaise more closely with parents. The teaching assistant and the teacher do not yet use their observations well enough to encourage more independence from children. The child–adult ratio is very generous. This leads to children seeking help from the adults too readily when they want something.

School details

Unique reference number	117388
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10005487

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 controlled
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	36
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Diana Howarth
Headteacher	Sarah Bridgman
Telephone number	01920 462 894
Website	www.tonwell.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@tonwell.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 September 2011

Information about this school

- This is a very small primary school with four mixed-age classes.
- Almost all pupils are of White British background.
- A small number of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils to whom the pupil premium applies is above average.
- Significant staff changes occurred at the beginning of this academic year. A new headteacher is leading the school following the resignation of the previous headteacher in July 2016. Two of the four teachers are also new to the school. None of the teaching staff were at the school at the time of the previous inspection that took place in September 2011.

- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information on its website about details of the curriculum and the impact of the primary physical education and sport funding on sport participation.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in all classrooms. The headteacher took part in joint observations with the inspector and attended all inspection team meetings.
- Observations were made of pupils' behaviour at the beginning of the day, at lunchtimes, breaktimes and when they were moving around the school. Pupils' behaviour was also observed in the classroom.
- The inspector spoke informally with pupils on the playground and at lunchtime. She met with the school council and took account of 11 responses from pupils who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the early years teacher and governors.
- The inspector met two representatives of the local authority and spoke with the teaching and learning adviser for the Diocese of St Albans.
- The inspector listened to pupils read and looked at work in pupils' books and on display. She observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents including minutes from meetings, the school development plan and performance information. Behaviour and attendance records and information relating to safeguarding were also scrutinised.
- The inspector took account of three staff questionnaires and eight responses to Parent View. She also took account of seven texts sent by parents and spoke to parents at the beginning of the school day.

Inspection team

Marianick Ellender-Gelé, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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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.

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