

Inspection of a good school: St Mary's CofE Primary School, Northchurch

Northchurch, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 3QZ

Inspection dates:

9 and 10 March 2023

Outcome

St Mary's CofE Primary School, Northchurch continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Mary's is a welcoming and caring place to learn. Pupils are kind and friendly. They welcome new pupils warmly and help them to settle in. Older pupils have a strong sense of self-belief and self-confidence, particularly in understanding and explaining right and wrong.

Teachers have high expectations, and pupils behave well. Classrooms are calm and orderly. Bullying happens infrequently. They understand the steps teachers follow to stop bullying from happening. This helps pupils feel safe.

Pupils learn a broad and interesting curriculum that develops their curiosity and talents. This prepares them well for the next stage of their education. Pupils particularly like it when visitors come to the school or they attend trips. This helps to deepen their understanding of the subjects they study. Pupils take pleasure in reading and sharing books. They show enthusiasm when explaining why they enjoy a particular book.

Pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities. Older pupils help younger ones and act as good role models. Pupils show consideration for each other. They understand and value difference. Pupils like to help others and make decisions about the school. For example, the school council raised money to buy new sports equipment.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders develop and change their curriculum plans to reflect pupils' needs. For instance, a few subjects are being adapted to ensure a sharper focus on pupils' language development. In many subjects, leaders have embedded the curriculum fully. Staff have strong subject knowledge. They present information accurately and clearly to pupils. During lessons, teachers question pupils to spot and address misconceptions immediately. As a result, teachers understand what pupils know and can do. They use this information to adapt curriculum plans to make sure pupils do not miss any important learning. Pupils talk confidently about their understanding and what they have learned in the past. Pupils achieve well.

Leaders have updated the programme they use for teaching phonics and early reading. This programme complements and builds on what the school provided previously. Staff have received some guidance and training for this programme. All staff teach sounds accurately. However, some staff do not have the confidence to teach parts of the phonics curriculum as leaders intend. Leaders have developed systems to track the progress of pupils. This is to make sure that pupils who need it have 'catch up' and 'keep up' sessions. Pupils enjoy reading. Most become confident, fluent readers.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn the full curriculum. Teachers adapt learning to support pupils with SEND when needed. Some pupils learn specific skills in small groups. Leaders check how well pupils are learning in some of these groups but not all. This means that leaders and teachers do not know whether this extra teaching is helping pupils with SEND learn more.

In the early years, teachers ensure that activities are well planned and develop children's communication and language skills. Children gain a good understanding of numbers and mathematical ideas through direct teaching, stories and their play. Children participate enthusiastically and are well supported by adults in all areas of learning. Staff use skilful questioning to inspire children's curiosity. Children follow well-established class routines. They are happy, calm and settled. Children are well prepared for their learning in Year 1.

Staff have clear expectations for pupils across all aspects of school life. They behave well in lessons. Occasionally, some pupils do not listen carefully in lessons. This is dealt with quickly. Staff foster positive and respectful relationships with pupils. Pupils know who to speak to if they have worries, and they trust adults to help them.

Pupils learn ways to keep themselves both physically and mentally healthy. They show an interest in the wider world and other cultures. Pupils understand that difference is a positive and that everyone is unique. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Leaders and governors share the same values and visions. Leaders and governors support staff with their workload and well-being. Staff are supportive of leaders. Leaders provide appropriate professional development for staff that improves their teaching.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors make sure that all staff receive regular, up-to-date and ongoing child protection training. Staff use the school's systems to record and report any concerns that a pupil is at risk of harm. Leaders act on concerns quickly to keep pupils safe. They make sure pupils get any help that they need.

Governors and leaders ensure that all checks required for adults working in school are carried out quickly and thoroughly.

Pupils learn how to stay safe online and in the community. They understand they must consider carefully what they say to others on messaging services.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff are not teaching all the planned elements of the phonics curriculum as leaders intend. They require further guidance and training to do this. This means some pupils do not progress with reading as quickly as they could. Leaders need to ensure that all staff have the guidance and expertise to implement the phonics programme consistently and effectively so that all pupils develop essential phonic knowledge as quickly as possible.
- Some pupils take part in intervention groups. Leaders are not checking that all these groups are making the difference intended. Leaders do not know if all interventions are effective in helping pupils to learn and remember more. Leaders must ensure that they check that all interventions are effective and are achieving their intended outcomes.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in September 2017.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	117424
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10255217
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Linda Slim and Kat Worth (Co-chairs)
Headteacher	Lynne Osborne
Website	www.stmarys916.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Leaders do not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school has a Christian religious character. The school's most recent inspection of its denominational education, under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, took place in May 2019. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, who is also the designated safeguarding lead. The inspector also spoke with a school improvement partner from the local authority and some members of the governing body
- The inspector carried out deep dives in three subjects: early reading, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, the inspector visited lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to pupils and looked at pupils' work.

- The inspector viewed a range of documents and information, including governor meeting minutes, records of behaviour and bullying incidents and safeguarding records.
- The inspector considered 95 responses and 66 free-text responses made by parents to the survey, Ofsted Parent View. The inspector also considered 21 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. There were no responses to the online pupil survey. The inspector spoke with pupils to seek their views and experiences of school.

Inspection team

Jessie Linsley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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