

# St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, Hitchin

Benslow Lane, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 9RD

## Inspection dates

26–27 September 2018

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Outstanding</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Outstanding</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Outstanding</b>
Early years provision	<b>Outstanding</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school

- A parent neatly and accurately described St Andrew's as 'an exceptional place, where pupils' well-being and academic excellence go hand in hand'.
- The exceptional leadership of the headteacher and the staff team has created a climate of high expectations, a love of learning and an insistence on the very best for every pupil.
- Governors share the headteacher's drive and ambition. They know the school well and robustly hold leaders and managers to account for the performance of pupils, as well as for the quality of teaching.
- Teachers have high expectations of their own performance. They research widely the most up-to-date educational studies to inform their practice. This leads to high expectations of pupils and exceptional outcomes for all.
- Teachers plan creative lessons which are now sharply focused on the higher standards. The impact of this is shown in current pupils' high-quality work across most of the curriculum.
- The curriculum provides very rich opportunities for pupils' learning. Reading, writing and mathematics are incorporated across the curriculum.
- The innovative approach of using art as a medium through which to teach other subjects is driving high standards in art and broadening pupils' cultural experience. Less successful is the teaching of geographical skills.
- There is high-quality provision for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and for those who are disadvantaged. Leaders are relentless in their quest to remove any barriers to learning. As a result, these pupils make strong progress from their different starting points.
- Strong leadership and excellent teaching in early years create a stimulating learning environment. Children get the best start to school life and are fully prepared for the demands of Year 1.
- As a result of strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, pupils develop as well-rounded, thoughtful citizens, who take an enormous pride in their responsibilities and the part they play within the school community.
- Behaviour is impeccable. Pupils are very polite, well mannered and enthusiastic in all they undertake. They want to do well. This attitude contributes to the high standards they achieve.

## **Full report**

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Enrich and embed the improvements made across the foundation subjects, particularly in geography, so that pupils sustain high achievement.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Outstanding

- The headteacher has set the bar high for all aspects of the school's work and is determined in her pursuit of excellence. She responded to the findings of the last short inspection with exceptional focus and energy. Expectations of what pupils can achieve in the foundation subjects have been raised and are now very high. The school's leadership team is strong and unified in purpose – to ensure that every child achieves their very best. The morale of members of staff in all roles is high and their enthusiasm for their work is infectious.
- Workplace training and learning, from the best educational research to inform teaching practice, are highly valued. As a result, a large number of staff have taken part in action research or have higher degrees in education. They value the risk-taking approach of the headteacher, as they enjoy trying new methods to help pupils learn well. The headteacher's philosophy of 'I don't mind if things go wrong so long as we learn from our mistakes' is empowering staff and building a strong, reflective team.
- Leaders know the school exceptionally well. Self-evaluation and the identification of priorities for improvement are wholly accurate. Leaders at all levels are involved in evaluating and monitoring their areas of responsibility, as well as setting future priorities. As a result, they feel accountable for their areas of responsibility and are enthusiastic about the impact they are having on the thriving development of the school.
- The school's values and excellent promotion of equality of opportunity are at the heart of its work. Leaders and governors deal with any issue that might prevent pupils from learning in order to secure positive outcomes for all pupils. The achievements of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities or who are disadvantaged are monitored closely. This monitoring, coupled with personalised learning and appropriate support, helps pupils to be confident and ready to learn. The funding to support these groups of pupils has been well spent. As a result, they make strong progress from their varying starting points.
- The primary school physical education and sport funding is also used well. Pupils take part in a wide range of sporting activities during and after school, such as gymnastics, cross-country and athletics. There are also opportunities for pupils to be involved in sports competitions with other schools in local and national events. One parent commented that it was good that the school was able to offer football to all pupils and not just to those who were good enough to be in the school's team. Rates of participation in the sporting activities are high. This is also the case with the vast array of extracurricular activities.
- The curriculum is well planned and has been reviewed thoroughly to ensure that it appropriately covers all required knowledge and skills. Leaders have deliberately woven into their planning the higher standards expected in the foundation subjects. The impact of this is coming through in current pupils' work. For example, pupils' enthusiasm for art is evident from the beautiful artwork around the school. However,

leaders recognise that there is still more work to do with the teaching of the more demanding geographical skills.

- The excellent promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education contributes enormously to the welcoming ethos created by the school. Adults constantly model respect and humanity and, in turn, pupils demonstrate a great deal of consideration and tolerance of each other and the wider community. One example of many was seen during the inspection, when pupils gave gifts to homeless people in their harvest festival.
- Parents and carers are highly supportive of the school and appreciate the variety of opportunities it provides for their children. A small minority of parents expressed concerns about the speed of reply from leaders at the school when they have raised issues or queries.
- Local authority and diocesan support is 'light touch' because there are no concerns about leaders' abilities to develop the quality of education. The school works closely with a number of other local schools, sharing good practice and challenging each other.

### **Governance of the school**

- The governing body is highly effective. It is exceptionally well informed and incisive in its approach to school improvement and analyses in depth all school information provided. Governors seek professional opinion from educational consultants to cross-reference their findings from their regular school visits and their discussions with staff and pupils.
- Leaders at all levels are held to account. Governors regularly receive presentations from leaders regarding progress in their areas, as well as visiting to see first-hand the impact of their work. Along with all staff, governors are involved in determining judgements in the school's self-evaluation and deciding which priorities for improvement are appropriate for the following year.
- Governors research the best use of expenditure. For example, when investing heavily in the outdoors area for early years, they researched which equipment would have the most impact upon children's learning and physical development. This informed their expenditure. This approach is also replicated in other areas. For example, the safeguarding governor visited other providers to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of their risk assessment before agreeing to the purchase of climbing equipment.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders' and governors' work in keeping pupils safe is thorough. Leaders have ensured that all staff are trained and well versed in the latest guidance. Staff receive regular updates and briefings. There is a clear message that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Leaders have also ensured that the curriculum helps pupils understand clearly how to stay safe in a variety of situations. Consequently, pupils feel safe, valued and well cared for.
- Leaders are persistent in cases where the school is concerned for a pupil's welfare.

Effective relationships with other agencies and with parents ensure that pupils are kept safe and their welfare needs are met.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Outstanding

- Sustained strong teaching has resulted in excellent learning and progress over time. Teachers have high expectations and are explicit with pupils regarding the quality of work expected. Pupils regularly check the quality of their work against the success criteria for the task. This helps pupils see clearly where they have been successful and where to give greater attention.
- Pupils are articulate and have command of an expansive vocabulary. This is because teachers model sophisticated use of language when they talk to each other and to the pupils. They do not shy away from using demanding technical specialist-subject vocabulary. For example, in an engaging Year 6 science lesson, pupils were adept at discussing the characteristics of invertebrates and myriapods. This was also seen in a Year 2 science lesson, where pupils spoke about the differing absorbency of paper.
- Pupils' vocabulary is also enriched through a strong reading programme. Pupils are encouraged to read demanding literature, as well as age-appropriate novels. Pupils of all levels of ability love reading. A Year 4 reader said that he was working hard to get better at his reading and that 'practice makes perfect'. A Year 6 pupil enthused about her love of poetry, saying, 'It's almost like music; it washes over you.'
- Pupils' love of reading starts early. They experience early success due to a systematic and rigorous approach to the teaching of phonics. Daily reading habits are cultivated from an early age. Many pupils read avidly at home and at school.
- Writing skills are very well developed in innovative ways that inspire the pupils. Teachers use many methods, such as speed writing, writing in pairs and writing in character. They also integrate writing into their teaching of other subjects. For example, in history, an older pupil wrote a superb piece in the character of Queen Elizabeth I, arguing for the expansion of the British Empire.
- Mathematics is also taught very effectively. Teachers explain the more difficult concepts well. Where needed, they will also provide support through analogies or pictures to help explain further. This ensures that all pupils progress in their knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers plan activities that are creative, interesting and varied. They use as their inspiration the local community, for example taking part in the Radcliffe project which explores the history of Hitchin Priory. In addition, they provide 'forest school' experiences, where pupils extend their learning outdoors and find out more about the natural world. For example, in a Year 4 art lesson, the pupils created art from natural materials, such as branches and leaves, to depict the emotions of the Carmelite monks.
- Additional adults are used extremely well and have the knowledge and skills to carry out their roles highly effectively. They have a very positive impact on pupils' outcomes.

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The importance placed on pupils' personal development and welfare is central and very visible in school. Staff and governors are conscientious in their responsibility to ensure that the school provides a safe, nurturing environment in which pupils can thrive and succeed.
- Pupils throughout the school are confident and articulate learners who are keen to talk about their learning. One pupil showed an inspector an artefact from home and described how it was important to his family and what he had learned from it. Another pupil spoke highly of the opportunities that they are given, such as working with an artist in residence or competing in the local schools' mathematics challenge. Pupils are proud of their achievements, celebrating widely the success of all.
- The strong emphasis on philosophical debate and spirituality has developed pupils' ability to think deeply and to reflect. For example, when discussing the story of Noah, a young pupil asked why humans were designed in such a fashion if God wanted more people in the world.
- Pupils are given numerous opportunities to develop their leadership skills. 'Eco warriors' promote environmental awareness, the 'worship acolytes' contribute to assemblies and the 'pupil parliament' ensures that pupils have a voice in how their school is led and developed. This develops maturity, as well as promoting teamwork for the good of all.
- Pupils know about different types of bullying and know of the distress and harm it may cause. They say that bullying is very rare and is always dealt with well by staff. As a result, pupils say they trust staff to help them if they have any concern. Pupils feel safe and well cared for. Parents who spoke to inspectors and who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They conduct themselves exceptionally well in lessons, at breaktime and lunchtime and around the school. They are consistently courteous and polite. They engage well with visitors to the school, welcoming them enthusiastically, chatting happily and explaining in detail what works well at school and why. One pupil explained to an inspector that he was really pleased that the inspectors had come to see such a great school.
- Pupils look after each other and this is clearly seen in the playground, where they will ensure that all have friends to play with. They also take it in turns to use the outdoor equipment and cheer other pupils on when they use it well. For example, Year 3 pupils cheered when a Year 5 pupil managed to complete the monkey bars.
- Pupils enjoy school and attend regularly. The systems for monitoring attendance, absence and punctuality are rigorous and effective.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Outstanding

- Senior leaders and governors are passionate about ensuring the highest possible standards for every pupil. As a result, pupils' achievement has continued to improve and outcomes are now outstanding across the school.
- In the last few years, all pupils have consistently reached standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are well above the national averages by the end of key stage 2. The most able pupils in the school attain particularly well compared with similar pupils nationally. The outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 1 are also high. By the end of Year 2, the proportion of pupils attaining the level expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics is well above pupils nationally, as is the attainment for the most able pupils.
- The proportion of pupils who reach the expected standard in the national screening check for phonics has continued to rise. Consequently, for the last two years, pupils have achieved above other pupils nationally. This means that pupils have a strong foundation to become very successful readers and are well prepared for the next steps in their education.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders and staff have taken effective action to secure higher standards in the foundation subjects. Progress in most of these subjects is strong, with numerous examples of high-quality work. For example, the scientific hypotheses and quality of investigations in current Year 6 work would not be out of place in Year 7. The impact of the focus on the higher skills in subjects is starting to be seen in geography.
- The school is quick to identify any pupils who are at risk of falling behind. Staff then make effective provision for them. This includes pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities. These pupils make very good progress because teachers give them activities well matched to their individual ability and needs. Teachers and teaching assistants work extremely well together to provide pupils with effective support.
- Leaders have addressed effectively the discrepancy between boys' and girls' progress in reading and writing in the early years so that pupils who are now in lower key stage 2 are working at age-related expectations or higher.
- The number of disadvantaged pupils in each year group is too small to make any reliable statistical comparisons between their progress and achievement and those of their classmates and pupils nationally. However, as a result of the effective use of pupil premium funding, this small number of pupils achieve very well, when considering their various starting points.

## Early years provision

## Outstanding

- The school admits 60 children in the Nursery from a wide area. A number of children start in Nursery with limited knowledge or understanding of English. As a result of particularly effective planning to meet individual needs, children quickly attain a good understanding of English. These children are able to communicate with adults and other children within a short space of time.

- Due to the high rates of progress made by children in Nursery, the pupils who continue into Reception have skills and abilities that are broadly typical or above for their age. Reception children also make outstanding progress. By the time they leave Reception, they achieve a good level of development, with many exceeding this measure.
- Routines for Nursery children are established very quickly. Within three weeks of starting, children are sitting patiently, eager to learn, with their 'looking eyes' and 'listening ears'. The gradual introduction of more complex resources, such as the extensive outdoor climbing frames, the dens and the mud kitchen, ensures that children feel safe while they develop their independence.
- Already, early in the term, Nursery children have a good understanding of how to be safe in the outdoor environment. They behave well, taking turns with equipment and sharing resources. They are kind and friendly to each other. Particularly striking was their confidence with visitors. For example, a concerned boy told an inspector not to go over to a particular part of the playground as there were too many wasps there.
- The environment is stimulating and exciting. It is carefully designed to promote development in all areas of the curriculum and is accessible for all children. Staff are highly skilled at using the children's interests to further learning. For example, in Reception, children were happily role-playing being in a restaurant, due to a child telling the adults and other children of his experiences.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers have an astute grasp of children's abilities and this is due to ongoing close observation. There is an excellent balance between the input of teachers and teaching assistants in the sessions. They model to the children high expectations with their talk, such as ensuring that children speak in full sentences, which helps with the development of writing. Home languages, such as Russian, are also carefully used to ensure that learners with emerging English can access the more difficult activities.
- Early years is extremely well led. There is a very clear view about the strengths and weaknesses of provision. Teachers have been supported to run a number of school improvement projects, such as speech and language development and early mathematics, which have resulted in resounding success. The sharp focus on the higher standards has led to significant leaps in the proportion of children who are exceeding age-related expectations.
- Leaders have close links with parents. Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's learning. Information about their child is regular, as are ideas to support them in their learning. Parents spoke highly of the workshops delivered by staff, which have enabled them to support their children with early mathematics and learning to read.
- Staff keep children safe and care for them well in the early years. All of the statutory welfare requirements are met and the school's safeguarding practices and procedures are strictly followed.



## School details

Unique reference number	117467
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10054379

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	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	268
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Smith
Headteacher	Deborah Fenn
Telephone number	01462 459 160
Website	<a href="http://www.standrews.herts.sch.uk">www.standrews.herts.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:head@standrews.herts.sch.uk">head@standrews.herts.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	15 March 2018

## Information about this school

- St Andrew's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School is average in size. However, it has a large community Nursery for three-year-olds, which runs two sessions – one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Two thirds of the children enter other schools when they get to Reception age.
- There are more girls than boys in the school. The current Year 4 class is the only class with more boys than girls.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils who have an education, health and care plan is above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and in receipt of pupil premium funding is below the national average.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons across a range of subjects in the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2. Some observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- During visits to lessons, inspectors spoke with pupils and looked at their work to find out more about how well they are learning.
- The lead inspector met with governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector discussed the school's effectiveness with a representative from the local authority.
- Discussions were also held with the headteacher, assistant headteachers, the business manager, subject leaders, the inclusion coordinator, staff with responsibility for the early years, staff with responsibility for safeguarding and new members of staff.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. Inspectors met formally with three groups of pupils and spoke informally to pupils in the playground.
- Inspectors read with nine pupils from a range of year groups, from Year 2 through to Year 6.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation. This included policies, leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness, the school's improvement plans, safeguarding records and information about pupils' attendance, attainment and progress.
- Inspectors considered 170 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 162 responses to Ofsted's free-text service. Inspectors also spoke to parents when they dropped their children off at school at the start of the day.

## Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Barraclough	Ofsted Inspector
Brenda Watson	Ofsted Inspector

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