

Esher Church School

Milbourne Lane, Esher, Surrey KT10 9DU

Inspection dates

8–9 January 2019

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Early years provision | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher and her leadership team have a clear vision to provide the best possible all-round education for the pupils at the school.
- Staff work well as a team. Parents are very positive about the caring environment the school provides for their children.
- Classrooms are happy places. Most pupils are hungry to learn and keen to discover new things about the world around them.
- The school's curriculum is a strength. Leaders have ensured that it meets the needs of all pupils well. The extra-curricular offer is particularly strong.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points. Over time, outcomes compare well to other schools nationally, especially at the end of key stage 1.
- The teaching of phonics is a strength and supports pupils well in developing their early reading skills.
- Children get off to a good start in early years. Most are ready for the challenges of Year 1 when they finish in Reception.
- Safeguarding is effective. The school has a strong culture of care. Pupils feel safe and free from bullying or any form of harassment.
- Governors have a good understanding of the strengths of the school. They are reflective about the role that they play in making the school even better.
- Most pupils behave very well. They are proud of their school and welcoming to visitors. Rates of absence are low.
- The school provides well for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Sometimes, teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour and engagement in learning are not as strong as they should be.
- Leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is not fully effective.
- Although pupils' progress in reading and mathematics is strong, their writing skills are not as well developed.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rigour of leaders' monitoring and assessment of the quality of teaching and learning across the school so that:
 - leaders have a more accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning and how this impacts on pupils' progress
 - staff benefit from accurate feedback about the quality of their teaching and receive timely advice on how to improve their practice
 - stronger classroom practice evident in parts of the school is recognised and shared to the benefit of all staff
 - governors have a more accurate picture of the overall quality of teaching in the school.
- Improve the rates of progress that pupils make in writing so that their achievements in writing improve to match those of reading and mathematics.
- Reduce the off-task behaviour evident in some classrooms to a minimum, so that learning is maximised, and all pupils make the progress of which they are capable.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher leads a happy and caring school. Her partnership with the deputy headteacher and other leaders is strong. Collectively, leaders have a clear vision of the school's purpose. As a result, pupils thrive at Esher Church School and are well prepared for the next stage of their education by the end of Year 6.
- Staff are dedicated and enthusiastic. They enjoy the additional responsibilities they are given by leaders. Senior leaders are mindful of the professional development of staff. Phase and subject leadership have been successfully strengthened in recent times. As a result, leadership of the curriculum is particularly effective.
- Leaders' self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is generally accurate. Their actions to improve pupils' writing and reduce off-task behaviour in classrooms, for instance, are beginning to improve these aspects of the school.
- The curriculum is a particular strength. Pupils enjoy coming to school because teachers make learning interesting and relevant. Classroom visits and the scrutiny of pupils' work showed inspectors that much of the learning planned by staff is based around real-life experiences. Practical activities are the norm. Educational visits and trips help pupils to make sense of what they are learning about and why.
- The school's extra-curricular offer is also strong. Pupils benefit from a wide range of clubs. Additional opportunities in the arts and sports are readily available before, during and after school.
- Residential trips featuring outdoor adventurous activities are well established for pupils in key stage 2. Performances in the local community and at national events promote pupils' self-confidence as well as the enjoyment of singing and making music.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. The school's distinctive Christian ethos is further enhanced by a strong personal, social, health and citizenship education programme. Assemblies focus on values and challenge pupils to consider their own contribution to school life. Themes such as the unlawful use of drones, for instance, keep issues current, interesting and meaningful for pupils.
- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do well at the school. This is also the case with pupils with SEND. Although the numbers of pupils in these vulnerable groups are small, leaders constantly assess and review the quality of education the school provides for each individual. Consequently, the academic and personal development of these pupils are given a high priority.
- Additional funding to develop physical education and sport is used wisely. Specialist instructors provide staff development as well as running a wide range of additional activities, including dance. Team sports are a strong aspect of day-to-day life at the school. Participation in local competitions is ongoing throughout the year.
- Leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is not as strong as other aspects of leadership in the school. Their assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching is not incisive enough. As a consequence, the quality of teaching is inconsistent because some teachers' expectations are not high enough, and they do

not have a clear understanding of how to improve. This means that pupils' progress is not as strong as it should be in some subjects and across different phases of the school.

Governance of the school

- Governance is a strength of the school. Governors undertake their roles diligently and have an active and high-profile presence in the school. They understand that their duties are strategic in nature but are keen to ensure that the day-to-day running of the school is as good as it can be. Their oversight of safeguarding and finance ensures that the school is a safe place to be and that it is resourced well.
- Since the school has become a single academy trust, governors have ensured that their collective role as a governing body has evolved. As a group they are reflective and very knowledgeable about the changing landscape of education and schools. Because of this, governors are constantly assessing their impact on improving the school.
- Governors understand the school's strengths well. They have a good grasp of the achievements of pupils across all phases of the school. However, their understanding of the quality of teaching and how this impacts on current pupils' progress is less well developed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff have attended appropriate training and understand their responsibilities well. The culture to keep children safe is strong. The school's caring ethos and nurturing environment are valued by parents, pupils and staff alike.
- Routines at the start and finish of each school day are sensible, allowing parents access to staff, yet keeping the school site secure. All parents who spoke to inspectors were very positive about all aspects of the welfare, health and safety of their children at school. Pupils feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they have worries or concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Classrooms are happy places to be. Most pupils engage with learning well due to the high quality of the curriculum and the efforts of staff to keep learning relevant and fun. Pupils told an inspector, 'learning is about the right level of challenge'. Inspectors' observations of teaching showed that this was mostly the case at Esher Church School.
- Teachers enjoy the freedom to innovate and be creative when planning learning. Classroom visits gave inspectors good insight into the importance that staff place on practical learning. Examples such as modelling rainfall and the formation of river systems using water in a sand tray are typical.
- The teaching of phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) is a strength. As a result, pupils' early reading skills are developed well. Although the outcomes of reading tests and assessments are seen as important, the fostering of pupils' love of reading and enjoyment of books is given a high priority by all staff.

- Teachers cater for pupils with SEND well. Support staff are used effectively to enable these pupils to access learning and make progress. Learning is generally pitched at the right level. The balance between supporting pupils with SEND and enabling them to access learning independently is always kept under constant review.
- In most lessons visited by inspectors, pupils understood what they were learning and why. Pupils' books show that the majority of lessons offer the right level of challenge for pupils of different abilities and across different year groups and subjects. This is especially the case in mathematics, where pupils' outcomes have been consistently strong over time.
- Despite good outcomes for pupils at the end of each key stage, the quality of teaching and learning is inconsistent across the school. Some teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils' behaviour or engagement in learning. In some classrooms pupils do not have a clear understanding of what they need to do. In others, levels of expectation are not high enough. When this is the case learning slows, and pupils do not make the progress that they could.
- In the recent past, pupils have not made strong enough progress in writing, especially by the end of key stage 2. Leaders have made this an urgent priority for improvement. Evidence gathered during the inspection, including from the scrutiny of pupils' books, show that teachers are already having a good impact on improving this situation.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils enjoy coming to school because of the caring ethos at the heart of the school's culture. Pupils told inspectors that the school is a friendly place, and that new pupils are welcomed and make friends quickly. When asked, new pupils confirmed this to be the case.
- Pupils show good attitudes to learning. Most are very motivated and enjoy learning about new things. Their pastoral development is given a high priority by staff. The curriculum, including the extra-curricular offer, is designed to ensure that the pupils' social and emotional development is strong.
- Inspectors' discussions with pupils showed that the curriculum also teaches pupils to be aware of potential dangers in life outside school. Learning about the potential dangers of using the internet or social media is given a high priority, for instance. Pupils understand about the different forms of bullying. They told an inspector that they feel free from bullying or 'harassment' of any kind.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils understand that they come to school to learn. They disapprove of poor behaviour. During a meeting with an inspector, one pupil offered the opinion that pupils, 'mostly keep the school rules of ready, respectful, safe, although some pupils often struggle with this'.

- Levels of attendance are high and compare well to other primary schools nationally. School leaders track absence well and intervene quickly before it becomes a problem. Rates of persistent absence are particularly low. This is the case for all pupils, including for those from vulnerable groups.
- During a minority of classroom visits, inspectors witnessed off-task behaviour that went unchallenged by staff. This was mainly when work was too easy, or when pupils did not know what to do next.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good or better progress across the school. This is true across the breadth of the curriculum, but particularly in reading and mathematics. This includes the very few pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds or those with SEND.
- Pupils make good progress when developing their early reading skills. This is because the teaching of phonics is strong. As a result, the proportion of pupils achieving at the expected standard in phonics screening checks compares favourably to other primary schools nationally.
- Outcomes at the end of key stage 1 are also consistently strong. The proportions of pupils achieving at the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics have been above national averages in recent years. The proportions of pupils achieving a greater depth of learning in these subjects were much higher than national averages in provisional test and assessment results in 2018.
- Pupils make good or better progress in reading and mathematics as they move through key stage 2. Scrutiny of pupils' work and the school's teacher assessments show this to be the case. By the time pupils get to the end of Year 6, their outcomes in reading and mathematics compare well to other schools nationally.
- Pupils also make good progress in subjects other than mathematics and English. Leaders attach a high degree of importance to ensuring that pupils access a curriculum that celebrates the arts and sport, for instance.
- The development of subject leadership has brought a new focus on making sure that pupils access a wide range of subjects. As a result, pupils enjoy being successful scientists, and are hungry to learn about the world around them.
- Pupils' writing skills are not as well developed as they should be. This was highlighted in provisional assessments at the end of Year 6 in 2018, where pupils' progress and attainment measures were well below the national averages. Although teachers have started to address this, leaders know that more work needs to be done across all year groups to ensure that outcomes in writing improve to match those of reading and mathematics.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years is well led and managed. Relationships between staff and children are strong. Parents are very positive about the quality of care and guidance their children receive. Those who talked to inspectors said that they felt their children were happy

and safe at school, because staff knew their children very well.

- As in key stage 1, the quality of phonics teaching is strong in early years, leading to good development of children's early reading and writing skills. Opportunities for children to access books or develop their writing skills are given a high priority by staff.
- Children make good progress from their different starting points in the early years. High proportions achieve or exceed the expected levels of development by the end of the Reception Year. This means that most children are very well prepared for their move up to Year 1 when it comes.
- Staff encourage children to become independent learners as soon as they start school. Much of the learning comes from children's own choices, although the balance of child-initiated learning and that directed by staff is carefully monitored and controlled. This ensures that children make steady progress across all the areas of learning in the early years.
- Expectations are high in Reception. Because of this, children behave well and are kind and caring to each other. Visits to classrooms throughout the inspection were marked by high degrees of cooperation between children, who are happy to take turns and share equipment.
- Although most children make good or better progress, staff know that outcomes are better for girls than for boys. This is particularly the case for reading and writing and for some aspects of boys' personal development. During the inspection, it was clear that teachers' recent work to address this imbalance was already having positive results.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 141733 |
| Local authority | Surrey |
| Inspection number | 10085491 |

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.

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 406 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair | Mrs Benedicta Holmes |
| Headteacher | Mrs Cathy Bell |
| Telephone number | 01372 463139 |
| Website | www.esherchurchschool.co.uk |
| Email address | office@esherchurchschool.org.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- This is a larger-than-average-sized primary school. As a school with a distinctive Christian ethos, the school was last subject to an inspection under section 48 of The Education Act 2005 in January 2018.
- The school converted to academy status in March 2015 and is governed by a single academy trust, Esher Church School Academy Trust.
- The previous school, Esher Church of England Aided Primary School, was last inspected in December 2007, when the overall effectiveness was judged to be outstanding overall.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. There are small numbers of pupils from other ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is low. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also low.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first full inspection of the school since it converted to academy status. The school was selected for inspection under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was subsequently deemed to be a section 5 inspection under the same Act by Her Majesty's Inspector and a full section 5 inspection was then carried out.
- Classrooms were visited on both days of the inspection. During classroom visits, inspectors observed teaching and learning, assessed the quality of pupils' work, and talked to them about the progress that they were making. Some classroom visits were accompanied by the headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- As well as looking at pupils' work in classrooms, a separate sampling of pupils' work in mathematics and English was held together with the English and mathematics subject leads.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed in classrooms and as they moved around the school. This included at the start of the school day and at break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors attended an assembly and heard pupils read.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders; the business manager; the chair of the governing body, accompanied by two other governors; and a group of pupils.
- Inspectors talked to parents in the playground at the start of day one of the inspection. Inspectors also reviewed the school's own parent survey. Three free-text messages were also received by the lead inspector after the inspection.
- A wide range of policies and records were scrutinised, including those regarding the safety of pupils. The school's self-evaluation, improvement planning and information about pupils' outcomes were considered. Minutes of governing body meetings and notes of visits from the local authority were also taken into account.

Inspection team

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|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Clive Close, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Peter Dunmall | Ofsted Inspector |
| Sue Cox | Ofsted Inspector |

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