

Inspection of a good school: Puller Memorial, Church of England, Voluntary Aided Primary School

High Cross, Ware, Hertfordshire SG11 1AZ

Inspection dates:

18 September 2019

Outcome

Puller Memorial, Church of England, Voluntary Aided Primary School continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils told us that their school was special. They said that Puller Memorial is a friendly school because you get to know everyone. They say that adults are friendly and give support when they need it. Pupils are happy to work and play alongside each other. At play times older pupils encourage younger ones. They include them in their games and activities. We saw pupils mixing magic potions together and drawing pictures on the playground with coloured chalks.

Pupils spoke enthusiastically about different things they learned at school. They enjoy learning when activities are practical. Science is a favourite subject for many. Recently, leaders have introduced new ways of teaching some subjects. Not all teachers understand how to use these approaches. Teachers do not have consistent expectations of what pupils could achieve.

Pupils are keen to do well. They work hard and are attentive to their teachers. Pupils are respectful of one another. They listen to contributions from their classmates and maturely discuss their ideas in groups. On a few occasions pupils do not concentrate fully. This is because the activities planned by teachers do not make clear what pupils need to know.

Pupils say bullying is rare but are confident that adults will help them if they are worried.

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

Leaders have made changes to make learning more exciting for pupils. There have been new approaches introduced to improve the quality of education. Leaders make sure that pupils learn the full range of subjects from the national curriculum. Some subjects are

being taught differently. However, some of the planned training for teachers has not yet taken place. For example, in mathematics not all teachers understand how to use the plans to check that pupils have a secure grasp of the things that they are learning. Some teachers do not know how to adapt activities to ensure that pupils are challenged and achieve well.

Leaders have ensured that each subject identifies what pupils need to know. However, the order for teaching the content of each subject is less clear. Some plans do not provide guidance about what pupils need to know before tackling new ideas. For example, in physical education (PE) pupils did not understand the skills they use when playing different games. Other plans are stronger because teachers have good subject knowledge. For example, science-based problem-solving tasks are set for pupils. The plans identify how pupils apply their knowledge to be successful.

New teaching methods are helping pupils to make a good start with their early reading. Children learn different sounds letters make as soon as they start school. They read books that help them to use these sounds in their reading. Some pupils still struggle to read fluently. This is the legacy of teaching approaches used in the past. Leaders are tackling these weaknesses through their plans for training the teachers.

In key stage 2 reading skills are taught well. Books shared with pupils often link to their topics. Well-planned activities build on pupils' skills and abilities to help them to understand a text. Teachers check how well pupils are achieving. They address gaps in pupils' knowledge to help pupils keep up with their peers. Pupils enjoy reading but there are no set expectations for the types of books pupils should read. This limits the breadth of pupils' reading.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support from their teachers. They ensure that their plans for these pupils are adapted to support their needs.

A range of different clubs and activities help to promote pupils' understanding of how to be healthy and keep fit. The school works with outside businesses to support the aspirations of pupils for different jobs and roles.

Leaders have created a strong team ethos. Staff consider that they are well supported by leaders. Teachers have different leadership roles in the school. Many are new to these responsibilities. They have not yet had opportunities to support improvements in the school. Governors are committed and supportive. They rely on the information from leaders to help them understand the questions they need to ask about the quality of education.

There is a bright and well organised learning environment in the early years. It is used well to help children to learn how to read and write. Adults ask questions to encourage children to talk about their learning experiences. They play alongside children to help them understand how to use activities purposefully. Children quickly develop early mathematical skills. They are encouraged to count and order objects. Some children carry out simple calculations.

Children work independently. They remain focused during their play. Children enjoy good relationships with other children and adults. This develops their social and personal skills. Children are well prepared for their move to Year 1.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils feel safe because of the caring nature of staff. Adults are vigilant for any signs that pupils may be at risk. Staff are well trained and receive regular updates to prevent any complacency. They understand how to report their concerns using the school's processes and systems. Leaders collect different information about pupils. They use this to ensure that there are no concerns about any pupils' safety or well-being. Checks to make sure that adults are suitable to work in school are thorough.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects the steps to help pupils remember more are not well sequenced. Leaders have not focused on the prior knowledge pupils need to tackle new ideas and concepts. Therefore, teachers are not able to plan a logical sequence of lessons that builds pupils' knowledge and skills. In science, technology, engineering and mathematics lessons this is clear because pupils require knowledge from these subjects to tackle the problems that are set for them. Leaders must ensure that all subject plans make clear links with previous learning to improve teachers' planning and better support pupils' learning.
- The new approaches to teaching phonics (letters and the sounds they represent) and mathematics are not consistently well taught. Teachers have not received all the training planned by leaders. This means that some teachers do not have the pedagogical understanding or subject knowledge to deliver leaders' plans successfully. Leaders should ensure that the training matches the curriculum intent. They should check that teachers' knowledge makes a successful contribution to the implementation of the new strategies for phonics and mathematics.
- A legacy of weakness in the school's approach to teaching phonics did not ensure that enough pupils read accurately. These pupils lack the phonic knowledge to read fluently. Leaders have introduced new approaches to address these weaknesses. Gaps should be addressed to help these pupils catch up quickly.
- The reading programme in key stage 2 does not ensure that all pupils read widely. There are no expectations of pupils to read a range of genres by the end of each year. The book lists provided are generic. Leaders' plans should identify which books are read by pupils to ensure that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Most teachers are new to leadership roles. They do not have the skills or opportunity to check the quality of education for which they are responsible. Leaders should provide

more time to develop skills of leaders, ensuring that they make a strong contribution to the improvement of the school.

- Governors are not clear how leaders are using new approaches to improve the quality of education. They do not have the expertise to support a rigorous challenge of leaders' intentions for the curriculum. Governors must ensure that they develop the skills to hold leaders to account.

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 a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged Puller Memorial, Church of England, Voluntary Aided Primary School to be a good school on 8 July 2015.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	117453
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10110263
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	59
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Gareth Ellis
Headteacher	James Howard
Website	http://www.alburyandpullerschools.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 July 2015

Information about this school

- Puller Memorial Church of England Primary School is a Church of England faith school located in the Diocese of St Albans. The religious character of the school was inspected under section 48 of the Education Act (2005) in July 2019 and was judged to be requiring improvement.
- The school is a smaller-than-average-sized school.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- The breakfast club is managed by the school. An after-school club is managed by an external provider.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and school leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator, and school staff. We also met with members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The subjects considered as part of this inspection were early reading, mathematics, and PE. In each subject we visited lessons, looked at the work in pupils' books, and held discussions with subject leaders, teachers and pupils.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised school policies, procedures and records. A meeting was held with the designated safeguarding leader to review examples of actions taken to keep pupils safe. Inspectors also checked staff's knowledge of how to keep pupils safe from harm.
- Inspectors spoke with parents as they collected their children from the school. Inspectors also considered 35 responses on Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 33 free-text messages.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Prue Rayner

Ofsted Inspector

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