

Inspection of Meppershall Church of England Academy

107 High Street, Meppershall, Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17 5LZ

Inspection dates: 24–25 September 2019

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Early years provision

Inadequate

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who attend Meppershall Church of England Academy do not receive a good quality of education.

Staff expectations about how pupils should behave are too low. Adults are not using the newly agreed behaviour policy. Many staff ignore poor behaviour regularly. Too many pupils do not listen to or follow instructions given by teachers and other adults. When this happens, adults do not remind pupils of the agreed expectations.

Pupils do not routinely show an interest in what they are learning. This is because the quality of their education is weak. Staff do not have high enough expectations about how well pupils should achieve.

Parents and carers have mixed feelings about how effective the school is. Some parents do not understand why changes are taking place and think behaviour is an issue. Others, mostly with children in the Reception class, are positive about how their children have settled into school and believe changes are improving the school.

Pupils feel safe at school because they know all the staff care about them. Pupils report that staff talk to and help them if they are worried about anything. This is especially the case if pupils are concerned about being bullied. Pupils said bullying is rare.

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

Since the previous inspection, there has been a significant decline in the quality of education and behaviour. The failings in the quality of education are because leaders (including governors) and staff have not given enough attention to what they are offering their pupils. Adults have not taken responsibility, nor been held to account, to make sure pupils learn well.

The headteacher has accurately identified the many issues and worked hard to deal with everything since her arrival in September 2018. However, she has not been supported well enough to address the failings in the school's provision quickly.

The governing body has an underdeveloped understanding about its roles and responsibilities. Governors do not know what steps to take to rapidly improve the school.

The reading and writing curriculum throughout the school is weak. The order in which these subjects are taught has not been well thought through by leaders and staff. Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding about approaches to teaching these subjects are underdeveloped. Pupils are not being helped to become better readers or writers. For example, pupils learn the sounds that letters represent in their phonics lessons, but when reading, pupils use the letter names rather than sounds to read unfamiliar words.

The mathematics curriculum is better structured because teachers use a step-by-step programme. However, teachers do not consider or adapt what they are teaching. They do not make sure pupils have understood concepts before they are moved on to the next bit of their learning.

Pupils leave Year 4 with substantial gaps in their skills, knowledge and understanding in reading, writing and mathematics. Furthermore, the school's curriculum in other subject areas has very little structure to show how pupils can develop their skills, knowledge and understanding. Where there are curriculum plans in place, staff do not always follow them. Pupils' experience in subjects such as history, art and science is reliant on teachers' choice of activity rather than any coherent plan.

The staff's approach to managing behaviour is too inconsistent. This means pupils have different experiences throughout the school. Pupils do not have a common understanding of what happens if they behave well or of the consequences if they do not behave as expected.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive a poor-quality education. Teachers do not take responsibility for this group of pupils in their classes. Pupils cannot take part in learning with their classmates well enough. Instead, teaching assistants are relied upon to manage pupils with SEND, very often outside the classroom. Teaching assistants have not been given adequate training to support them in this.

Children are not taught basic routines in Reception. Adults' expectations about how children should behave are too low. Children do not experience high-quality learning opportunities. The new early years leader is starting to set higher expectations. Her work in the last three weeks has brought improvements to how the area looks. Children are also being reminded about how to treat each other, follow instructions and behave appropriately. Expectations set by the early years leader are higher than previously. It is too early to see the longer-term impact of this work in raising standards in early years.

Pupils are aware of the values promoted in the school and can name the main values of trust, respect, courage and truthfulness. Pupils regularly revisit these values, along with British values during collective worship and during 'reflection time'. Leaders are reviewing the personal, social and emotional education curriculum so pupils develop a better understanding of how these values can be used in pupils' day-to-day life.

All pupils spoken to enjoy the opportunities they are given. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their visit to a mosque and a farm, attending sports competitions at a local school, and the various clubs and activities. Pupils are looking forward to their residential trip when they are in Year 4. Pupils talk positively about their roles as school councillors and see this as a way to help improve the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders prioritise the safeguarding of pupils. Leaders' checks on the suitability of staff, volunteers and visitors to work with children are thorough. Appropriate measures are taken to respond to any concerns about pupils' welfare and safety.

Staff are well trained and therefore know what to do should they have a concern about a pupil's safety or welfare. All procedures in place to safeguard and look after pupils are understood by staff. Leaders work well with external agencies to provide a range of welfare support to families. The designated safeguarding lead ensures all records relating to safeguarding are meticulously maintained. Any concerns raised are followed up swiftly to ensure pupils are not at risk.

What does the school need to do to improve?

- Reading and phonics are not taught well. All staff need training to improve their subject knowledge and their understanding of how pupils learn to read, including early reading development and phonics.
- The curriculum throughout the school has not been well considered and developed. Leaders need to ensure all subjects are planned carefully, making sure that pupils have the opportunity to build on their prior learning and develop their knowledge and understanding. Curriculum leaders need to understand what a good-quality education looks like in their school and know how they will check that this is in place.
- Staff are not held accountable for the impact of their work in delivering the curriculum and improving pupils' behaviour. Low expectations and inconsistent use and application of agreed systems and policies are contributing to the challenges the school faces. Staff should raise their expectations and follow the agreed systems, and they need to be held accountable for their work.
- Governors do not understand their strategic roles and responsibilities. They need to increase their understanding of their roles so they can hold leaders to account for how leaders are addressing weaknesses in the curriculum and behaviour.
- Teachers need to ensure that pupils with SEND have access to a high-quality curriculum and that their needs are well met. Leaders need to hold staff to account for ensuring that this occurs.
- The early years curriculum has not made sure that children develop their skills, knowledge and understanding to prepare them for Year 1. The very recent improvements in early years need to continue. Adults working in early years need to be trained so they understand how to support and challenge children when children are making their own choices about the activities they do.
- It is recommended that the school should not appoint newly qualified teachers.

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're 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	139865
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10110285
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	112
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Graham Jones
Headteacher	Caroline Sledge
Website	www.meppershall.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23–24 February 2016

Information about this school

- Meppershall Church of England Academy 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 November 2015 and was judged to be good.
- Meppershall Church of England Academy is smaller than the average-sized primary school. There is one class per year group from Reception to Year 4.
- A new headteacher joined the school in September 2018.
- The school continues to be a stand-alone academy following its conversion on 1 July 2013.

Information about this inspection

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.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons

responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- During this inspection, inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, who is also the interim special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), and the assistant headteacher. Inspectors also met with the curriculum leaders for reading, writing, mathematics and history. The lead inspector met with the assistant headteacher to discuss the curriculum.
- The lead inspector met the school business manager and the headteacher to discuss safeguarding.
- The lead inspector met with four members of the governing body, including the chair. She also met with a representative from the local authority who attended both the inspection team meeting and the final feedback meeting. Additionally, the lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the external school improvement partner and a representative from the Diocese of St Albans.
- The subjects of reading, writing, mathematics and history were considered as part of this inspection. The lead inspector also checked the curriculum provision in other subject areas during the second day of the inspection. Inspectors spoke to curriculum leaders, visited lessons, looked at a range of pupils' work, and met with teachers and pupils. Inspectors visited phonics lessons, heard pupils read and observed staff reading to pupils as part of guided reading sessions.
- Alongside leaders, inspectors looked at a sample of pupils' books from different year groups and across a range of subjects to evaluate pupils' learning in English, mathematics and history and throughout the wider curriculum. This included pupils' work from the previous academic year.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experiences of school life and their learning to find out what it is like to be a pupil at Meppershall Church of England Academy. Additionally, the 24 responses to the online questionnaire for pupils were considered. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and during break- and lunchtime.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents gathered at the end of the first day of the inspection and the beginning of the second day of the inspection. They also took account of the 17 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as the 21 free-text responses.
- Inspectors took account of the two responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and the 15 returned confidential paper questionnaires, and met with teachers at various times to talk about their work.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents, including those related to curriculum planning and development, safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, the school's evaluation of its own performance, the school's development plans and the external work that has been carried out by the local authority and the Diocese of St Albans to support the school.

Inspection team

Tracy Fielding, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kevin Rae

Ofsted Inspector

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