

Inspection of a good school: Almond Hill Junior School

Almonds Lane, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 3RP

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 May 2021

Outcome

Almond Hill Junior School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and enjoy learning at Almond Hill Junior School. They get on well with each other. They are polite, kind and helpful to adults and their peers.

Classrooms are enjoyable, interesting places to learn. Leaders have high expectations of pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour. Pupils work well with each other. They show curiosity in their learning. They enjoy their lessons and can remember work they have learned. This is because learning is planned carefully and taught well. A range of pupils' work is prominent around the school. There are eye-catching displays showing what pupils have been learning across the curriculum.

Pupils show respect to each other and their teachers outside of lessons. They listen to adults and follow their instructions. The atmosphere around the school is calm and purposeful. At playtime, boys and girls play happily together.

Pupils told the inspectors that they feel safe in school. Parents agree that their children feel safe. Pupils said they could approach teachers if they had concerns. They are confident that staff would sort out any problems they have. Pupils understand that bullying is unpleasant and wrong. Any incident is dealt with sensitively by adults.

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

The new headteacher leads the school with a clear vision and direction. Leaders are ambitious for pupils to do well. They have focused on developing effective improvement plans since the previous section 5 inspection in 2016. As a result, leaders can judge the impact of their actions on improving the school. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve.

Leaders have redesigned the curriculum in each subject. Pupils study all of the national curriculum subjects. This helps them to become well-rounded individuals. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum covers the things that pupils need to know by the time they

leave the school. Subject leaders have been appropriately trained to develop subject plans. These plans, for example, in mathematics and science, set out what pupils learn in a sensible order. Teachers know what needs to be taught and the best order in which to teach it. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subjects they teach. In lessons, teachers check that pupils have learned what they are expected to know. They quickly spot when pupils need extra help. Pupils revisit their learning often. This helps them to remember the most important facts and ideas.

Reading is a high priority. Teachers encourage a love of reading. Pupils are encouraged to read for pleasure. Teachers have clear expectations of the types of books pupils should experience and read. Pupils are taught how to improve their reading, so they can become fluent readers. They are encouraged to read books with more challenging content as they become more confident. Some pupils start Year 3 with weak phonics knowledge and skills. Teachers promptly identify those pupils who need extra help. These pupils get focused phonics and reading support.

Teachers enable pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to access the same curriculum as other pupils. Pupils with SEND who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan are well supported. This helps them to meet their targets. Leaders monitor closely how well these pupils are doing. They use this information to make timely and appropriate changes to the nature of the help individual pupils receive. Leaders' checks upon the impact of support for pupils with SEND who do not have an EHC plan have been less systematic. Leaders have put new systems in place to evaluate more sharply the difference that this help is making, so that changes can be made when necessary. It is too soon to establish the impact of this work.

Pupils' personal development is important in this school. Pupils learn life and social skills. These are well taught. Pupils have an active voice in the school. For example, pupils can take part in the school council and school government. They learn about democracy and mutual respect. They practise cooperation and communication, helping them to develop mature, tolerant attitudes. Pupils have a good knowledge of British values. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain.

Governors know many aspects of the school's work well. They check on safeguarding procedures and the welfare of pupils, and are developing a clear understanding about different aspects of the school's curriculum. Governors have a less precise understanding of the nature and effectiveness of the school's work to support some pupils with SEND.

Support from the local authority has enabled senior leaders and governors to carry out their work more effectively. Staff who responded to the online survey agree that leaders and governors are considerate of their workload and well-being. Teachers appreciate this and staff morale is high.

In discussion with the headteacher, we agreed that the support for pupils with SEND but who do not have an EHC plan, and governance, may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The culture of safeguarding is strong. Adults understand their roles and responsibilities for keeping everyone safe. They have, for example, a detailed understanding of the risks associated with the criminal exploitation of children known as county lines. There is a high priority placed on staff training. Regular briefings help to maintain adults' understanding of safeguarding matters. Leaders work with other agencies to support vulnerable pupils and their families. Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe when using technologies such as the internet.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' arrangements for monitoring how successfully pupils with SEND who do not have an EHC plan are learning the curriculum are new. Leaders need to embed these new monitoring systems so that they are alerted to any changes in pupils' needs, or the effectiveness with which they are being met, as swiftly as possible.
- Governors do not have a precise enough understanding of how far the support provided to some pupils with SEND meets their needs effectively. This means governors are not holding leaders to account sufficiently for this aspect of their work. Governors should continue to develop their expertise and processes for monitoring the arrangements to support all pupils with SEND.

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 or outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that a good 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 the school to be good on 3 and 4 March 2016.

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 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.

If you are the school and 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 [here](#).

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	117221
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10193967
Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	312
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair of governing body	Andrew Boakes
Headteacher	Emma Fordham
Website	http://www.almondhill.herts.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	3 and 4 March 2016

Information about this school

- In September 2017, Almond Hill Junior School entered a phase of expansion with the opening of a new building. The school increased from two form of entry to three form of entry over a four-year period. In September 2020, the school became a three-form entry school.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, including the special educational needs coordinator and the curriculum subject leaders, and governors, including the chair of the governing body. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors analysed 27 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 27 free-text responses. Inspectors considered 71 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 31 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors spoke with teachers, support staff and pupils during the inspection.

- Inspectors took account of a wide range of information, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans, information about pupils' needs, and leaders' records about pupils' behaviour. To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed school policies, procedures, and records, and spoke with the headteacher, who is also the designated safeguarding lead. Inspectors also spoke to staff, governors, and pupils about the school's approach to keeping pupils safe.
- The subjects covered in depth as part of this inspection were reading, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. In each subject, inspectors spoke with subject leaders, teachers, and pupils. Inspectors visited lessons and scrutinised pupils' work.

Inspection team

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Brenda Watson

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates:
<http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2021