

Inspection of a good school: Fairlands Primary School

Pound Avenue, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG1 3JA

Inspection dates:

14 and 15 September 2021

Outcome

Fairlands Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy school. For them, school is a place where they learn and make friends. They are enthusiastic about the broad range of subjects they study. Pupils learn the knowledge they need to help them achieve well and develop new interests. There are many opportunities for pupils to widen their experience through their lessons, 'wow' days, visits, visitors, and residential trips. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education.

Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. In classrooms, pupils learn in a calm and orderly atmosphere. Pupils are friendly and polite, and understand what is expected of them. Relationships are positive and pupils have the necessary support they need to be successful.

Pupils feel safe in school. They learn how to keep themselves and others safe, in the wider world and online. They know who to talk to if they have any worries or concerns. Pupils know that adults will help them sort out any difficulties they may have. Incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with quickly.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive. They appreciate the school's caring and supportive culture in which their children thrive. Parents are confident that any concerns they raise are dealt with promptly and professionally by school staff.

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

Leaders have carefully considered the curriculum. Curriculum plans are ambitious and clearly set out what pupils should learn in each subject. Teachers plan lessons that build on what pupils have learned before. Pupils revisit and practise important knowledge before they move on to learning new things. This also helps pupils make connections in their learning. For example, in mathematics pupils recognise how their learning builds over time to enable them to complete more-complex calculations. In history, pupils can talk about the 'how' and 'why' of events in the past. They can explain why the Romans conquered Britain and how life in Britain changed as a result.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn and achieve well alongside their peers. This is because teachers adapt the curriculum effectively to meet pupils' individual needs. Staff work well with pupils to help them overcome challenges and access their learning. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) works closely with staff, with parents, and with pupils, to ensure that pupils with SEND receive the right support at an early stage.

Leaders have a clear approach to teaching phonics and early reading. Staff are well trained. Pupils begin learning phonics as soon as they start school. In Nursery, children are taught to listen carefully and repeat back the sounds to adults accurately. Children make a strong start to learning to read. In the early years and key stage 1, pupils read books that are closely matched to the phonics they are learning. Pupils practise and secure their knowledge of the sounds they have been taught. They quickly build their confidence and fluency and enjoy becoming good readers.

Less-confident readers in key stage 2 receive extra support to help them secure their phonics knowledge. This helps pupils with their reading and their spelling. Staff use prompts and questions well when they are teaching older pupils. They ensure that pupils read texts accurately when they are reading aloud. However, staff often too quickly sound out words for older pupils, rather than ensuring that pupils practise their own understanding to sounding out unfamiliar words. This does not help older pupils develop their reading fluency as well as they could.

In the early years, children learn how to hold a pencil or pen correctly when writing. Younger pupils learn to form and write their letters correctly as part of their phonics lessons. However, the curriculum does not support pupils to maintain correct letter formation or develop fluency in their handwriting as they progress through the school. This means that pupils do not continue to develop the skills they need to write fluently and clearly. There has not been a sufficient emphasis on handwriting fluency in developing the curriculum for English.

Pupils are provided with a wide range of additional experiences and educational visits, which adults use well to extend pupils' knowledge and wider development. During the pandemic, leaders found different ways to enrich pupils' learning experience at school and at home.

Governors are knowledgeable about their role. They assure themselves that leaders' actions are making a positive difference to the quality of education for all pupils. Governors access regular training to help them keep up to date so they can carry out their responsibilities effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. All staff are vigilant to the signs of potential abuse. There are clear systems for recording and reporting concerns

and staff are regularly trained. Safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures are reviewed regularly and updated promptly to reflect changes in statutory guidance.

Governors ensure that leaders provide pupils with the right information to help keep themselves safe, especially when using online technology. Leaders work well with other agencies to help ensure that pupils and families get the right help they need. All the necessary checks are carried out when staff are appointed to work at the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff do not ensure that older pupils who are less-confident readers practise applying their phonics knowledge when they are reading aloud. This means that these pupils are not becoming fluent and confident in reading as quickly as they could. Leaders should provide clear guidance and training to staff to enable older pupils to practise and gain fluency in reading.
- Pupils do not develop their handwriting knowledge and skills as they progress through the school. This limits pupils' ability to get their ideas quickly and clearly onto paper when they are writing. Leaders must ensure that they have clear expectations, and that the curriculum is designed and implemented to support pupils in developing a fluency and consistency in handwriting.

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, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Fairlands Primary School and Nursery, to be good on 3 and 4 October 2012.

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 Ofsted 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.

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	143785
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10200442
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	660
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Claire Peacock
Headteacher	Robert Staples
Website	www.fairlands.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2 and 3 October 2012

Information about this school

- Fairlands Primary School converted to an academy in April 2017.
- The school is one of two primary schools that form part of The Claxton Trust.
- The school has a nursery class for children, who can join from three years old.
- There is an on-site breakfast and after-school club which is run by the governing body.

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 school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and the three deputy headteachers (including the SENCo). They held a meeting using a video link with the chair of governors and representatives of the governing body and spoke with the school improvement partner on the telephone.
- Inspectors did deep dives in early reading, history, mathematics, and physical education. Inspectors held discussions with subject leaders, visited lessons, looked at curriculum plans, spoke with pupils, looked at their books, and met with teachers.

- Inspectors spoke with pupils at breaktime and observed their behaviour around the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised the records which the school keeps in relation to safeguarding. Inspectors looked at the single central record of pre-employment checks and records of training. Inspectors held meetings with the designated persons with responsibility for safeguarding and with school staff. Inspectors met with the staff who run the school's breakfast and after-school clubs to discuss the safeguarding arrangements that are in place to safeguard the pupils who attend these provisions.
- Inspectors considered the 120 responses that were submitted as part of the online Ofsted Parent View survey, including 57 free-text responses. Inspectors considered the 57 responses to the pupil survey and the feedback provided by 53 members of staff through the staff survey.

Inspection team

Katherine Douglas, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Susannah Connell

Ofsted Inspector

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