

Inspection of Sutton Church of England Voluntary Aided Lower School

High Street, Sutton, Bedfordshire SG19 2NE

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 September 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected 15 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until this year the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections.

Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils really enjoy attending this small, friendly school. It is a close-knit community where everyone looks after one another. Pupils 'live the school's values' through the kindness, respect and care they show for others. They are confident to share their feelings and opinions. They show respect for other cultures and beliefs and know why this is important.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils in all respects. Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations. All pupils want to learn and do their best. They take part in learning activities enthusiastically and learn well across the curriculum. Pupils concentrate and listen attentively to others in lessons.

Pupils behave exceptionally well in and out of lessons. High expectations of behaviour are evident right from when children start school and join the Reception class. Bullying and acts of unkindness are extremely rare.

Pupils know the importance of recognising how they and others are feeling. They use 'talk time' and the 'worry box', and this contributes well to looking after their well-being. Pupils know that adults will help them with any problems or concerns.

There are a range of clubs, opportunities to be monitors and 'The Sutton Challenge'. These activities and roles enable pupils to follow their interests, act responsibly, volunteer and develop independence.

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

Leaders have constructed a curriculum that provides pupils with a broad education. They have identified what they want pupils to know in each subject as they progress through the school.

Leaders have mostly organised the important subject knowledge that pupils need to learn in a logical way. Pupils build on what they have learned previously. This is particularly the case in mathematics and reading. In some other subjects, there is still some more work for leaders to do so they precisely identify the knowledge that pupils should learn and the order in which it is taught. Teachers occasionally plan activities that do not use or build as well on what pupils already know and can do. There are times when pupils have fewer chances to practise and use what they know. Pupils sometimes struggle to remember important knowledge. However, by the time they leave the school, pupils have the strong foundations they need for the next stage of their education.

Children in the Reception class are introduced to books and stories from the very start. They enjoy reading. Children especially like the books that teachers read to them. They say they learn new words from these books and use the new ideas in their own writing.

Staff are skilled at teaching phonics and reading. Pupils use their phonics knowledge to read and spell unfamiliar words. Teachers make sure that reading books are matched to the sounds pupils know so that pupils can read with accuracy and understanding. Teachers quickly spot pupils who struggle with reading. They ensure that these pupils get the extra help needed to catch up.

Staff know individual pupils well. They know the specific needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders provide the training that adults need so that adults can better support the pupils they work with. Staff ensure that pupils with SEND get the help they need to access the same learning as their classmates.

Leaders enable pupils to learn about values that help to develop character and an understanding of right and wrong. Pupils know what it means to be a good friend. They respect others and do not accept any form of prejudice or unfairness. Leaders carefully choose educational visits to help pupils learn about communities that are different to their own.

Pupils are very well cared for. They know the importance of keeping fit both physically and mentally. Adults encourage children in Reception to talk about their feelings from very early on. Pupils and parents gave examples of how staff had 'gone above and beyond' to provide support through difficult times.

Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations of behaviour and attendance. Few pupils are regularly absent. Adults model how to behave and interact with others. Pupils are eager to learn and try new things. No learning time is lost because of poor behaviour. Pupils manage their own behaviour very well.

Staff feel well supported by leaders. Leaders consider staff workload. Teachers value the training that they have had in teaching English and mathematics. Leaders have firm plans in place to provide further training to support the teaching of other subjects, so that all subject plans are fully implemented.

Governors have the expertise needed for their roles. Governors make sure that leaders identify priorities that benefit pupils' learning and development.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are trained and vigilant. They know the signs that could indicate that pupils are at risk of harm and report these in line with the school's policy. Safeguarding concerns are dealt with promptly. Leaders ensure that pupils quickly receive the help that they need.

Pupils learn how to stay safe when using online technologies. Teaching about online safety is made relevant for pupils of different ages. Pupils know what to do if they

receive unpleasant texts or inappropriate images. Pupils learn about respecting others' personal space in personal, social and health education.

Checks on the suitability of adults to work with children and safeguarding procedures reflect the latest published guidance.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not precisely identified the subject-specific knowledge that pupils need to learn and remember in some parts of the curriculum. Teachers have not had training to enhance their teaching across all areas of the school's curriculum. Some pupils have misunderstandings, which detracts from the progress they could make, or they struggle to remember the important parts of their learning. Leaders should ensure that curriculum plans are clear, and that teachers receive the training planned so that pupils' learning is highly effective and as leaders intend.

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	109626
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10199313
Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	68
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Dix-Pincott
Headteacher	Lucy Chapman
Website	www.suttonvalowerschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 November 2006

Information about this school

- Sutton Lower School is a Church of England School. It is in the Diocese of St Albans.
- The school has three classes. There is a Reception class, a Year 1 and 2 class and a Year 3 and 4 class.
- The proportions of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are smaller than in most primary schools.
- Most staff were not working at the school when it was previously inspected. The headteacher took up post in January 2015.
- The religious character of the school was inspected under section 48 of the Education Act (2005), in March 2017, and was judged to be outstanding.
- There is a breakfast club that is run by the school.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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. The lead inspector held remote meetings with members of the governing body and a local authority representative.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, art, geography and science. They met with subject leaders, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, spoke with pupils and staff, and listened to pupils reading. Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and other documentation in a range of other subjects and visited lessons in other subjects.
- To check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including school policies, procedures and records. The lead inspector met with the headteacher to discuss her work as the designated safeguarding leader and review examples of the actions taken to keep pupils safe. Inspectors spoke to pupils and checked staff members' understanding of how to keep pupils safe from harm.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation and policies, including records of governors' meetings and information relating to pupils' attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors gathered pupils' views by speaking to groups of pupils and speaking to pupils at lunchtime and in lessons. Inspectors also considered 12 responses to Ofsted's pupils' survey.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the school day, and they considered the 28 responses and 24 free-text responses submitted to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- The lead inspector spoke to a group of non-teaching staff. Inspectors took account of the 12 responses to Ofsted's survey for staff.

Inspection team

Paul Wilson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Damian Loneragan

Her Majesty's Inspector

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