

Inspection of St Mary's VA CofE Lower School

High Street, Clophill, Bedfordshire MK45 4BE

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 September 2021

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

This school was last inspected 14 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 November 2020, 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 enjoy coming to school. They are enthusiastic about learning and are kind to one another. Leaders teach and model values such as respect, humility and courage. Learning about these values enriches pupils' relationships and helps them to understand the world around them. Pupils are committed to the school values. Some become 'values ambassadors' and act as role models for others. Pupils value all people equally, regardless of their beliefs or other characteristics.

Teachers encourage pupils to have good manners. In classes and around the school, pupils follow adults' instructions. Lessons are calm and orderly. Relationships between pupils and adults are warm. Bullying is very rare. Pupils feel safe and they say that teachers are 'fair'.

Pupils take part in regular events such as charity days. They attend clubs that provide a range of activities. Pupils learn from, and interact with, the local community. For example, they make gifts for residents at the local residential home. Jake, the school dog, adds to school life and pupils' enjoyment.

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

Leaders, including governors, and teachers are keen for pupils to experience a rich and varied curriculum. Leaders and teachers have received training in curriculum development and implementation. They actively seek new approaches to subject teaching to enhance pupils' experiences. Leaders work with the local middle school to support curriculum development, such as by developing the school's calculation policy so that pupils are better prepared for the next stage of learning. Leaders have made sure that much of the curriculum is more structured. It is now usually clear what specific pieces of knowledge pupils need to learn at which times.

In places, the curriculum lacks depth and focuses too much on how content is taught, rather than on what content is taught. Pupils do not learn as effectively when this is the case.

Teachers' use of ongoing assessment helps them to quickly spot pupils' misconceptions and give timely support. This also provides useful feedback to teachers about how pupils' knowledge and understanding is developing. Teachers also assess pupils' retention of knowledge every term.

Teachers give pupils frequent opportunities to recall and use what they have recently been taught, such as by devoting the start of maths lessons to rehearsing maths facts, and through 'echo-reading' new vocabulary and phrases in reading lessons. This helps pupils to secure new knowledge in their long-term memories.

Leaders' focus on the curriculum and high standards in reading enables pupils to achieve well. Teachers give children a head start on phonics in nursery. Staff have been well trained to teach phonics, and the reading curriculum is well sequenced.

Consistent teaching and practice of phonics in the Reception Year ensures that pupils quickly become fluent readers.

Classroom routines, warm relationships and shared expectations of behaviours mean that lessons are calm and positive. Pupils are praised frequently. Pupils' commitment to the school values is also reflected in their conduct in and around the school, in classrooms and with each other. As a result, the exceptional attitudes help pupils to make the most of their learning. Pupils experience a wide range of personal development opportunities, for example through taking on 'young leader' responsibilities in Year 2 and through taking part in charity work. This helps pupils to develop a sense of community responsibility.

Leaders are passionate and ambitious for the early years. They have put in place a curriculum that gives children a broad range of understanding in readiness for key stage 1. Teachers identify and address pupils' needs early on. They monitor pupil engagement and are mindful of pupils' well-being.

The delivery of the curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils are known very well, and their progress is monitored closely. Pupils are helped to overcome barriers to learning. The school works with a range of external agencies. However, in some cases, plans for pupils with SEND do not set targets that are precise enough.

Governors know the school, the teachers, and the community well. They are mindful of teachers' well-being. Governors are clear that education is the key to social mobility. They are well trained and fulfil their duties under the Equality Act 2010. They are keen for children to experience a successful transition to middle school. Pupils have opportunities to take part in a programme of transition activities for middle school. As a result, pupils look forward to their next steps. Governors work closely with school leaders to prioritise curriculum, well-being and the schools' values.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is a high priority at St Mary's. Leaders have good knowledge of the children and their families. Staff are well trained in safeguarding and they work closely with outside agencies.

Regular well-being checks keep leaders attuned to the needs of pupils. Leaders regularly audit their approaches to safeguarding. Systems of documenting referral and support for pupils are being transitioned to an electronic format, but still allow for documentation to be viewed and amended by leaders. Systems for recruiting and checking staff are robust. The school's single central record is up to date.

Teachers teach children about relationships and how to stay safe online. Pupils know who they can talk to if they have concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some parts of the school's curriculum have too much of an emphasis on how pupils learn, rather than on the content that pupils will learn. As a result, not all pupils learn and remember the content that leaders intend for them to learn. Leaders should review their curriculum plans to ensure that all curriculum plans identify the detailed content pupils will learn and when they will learn it.
- Targets in personal plans for pupils with SEND are not as specific as they should be. The support pupils with SEND receive is therefore not as precise as it ought to be. Leaders should ensure that targets set in plans for pupils with SEND are more specific.

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	109617
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10199423
Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	2 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	124
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Emma Thoullass
Headteacher	Karen Bingley
Website	www.clophillstmarysschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 and 16 May 2007

Information about this school

- St. Mary's VA CofE Lower School is a small village school. The majority of pupils are from a White British background. The proportion of pupils with SEND is below the national average.
- The school has on-site provision of a nursery. This caters for pupils from two years old.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

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.
- The lead inspector spoke with the school's designated safeguarding lead. They scrutinised safeguarding records and the school's single central record of recruitment and vetting checks.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, science, history and mathematics. The deep dives involved meetings with subject leaders,

teachers and pupils. Inspectors also looked at pupils' books and the school's curriculum plans.

- Inspectors also met with governors and senior leaders.
- Inspectors reviewed 47 parent responses to the survey, Ofsted Parent View. This included 33 free-text responses. Inspectors also looked at the responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Hannah Stoten, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Wendy Varney

Her Majesty's Inspector

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