

Inspection of Thomas Whitehead Church of England Academy

Angels Lane, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 5HH

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 September 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Early years provision

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils do not receive a good standard of education. The curriculum is poorly planned. Leaders do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils do not achieve well.

Pupils do not learn to read well enough, including children in early years. This makes it difficult for them to learn successfully in other subjects. In almost all subjects, pupils are behind where they need to be for their age. The curriculum does not help them to catch up quickly.

Behaviour is improving. Pupils are respectful and caring. Staff are kind and sensitive to pupils' emotions. They keep pupils safe. Bullying is rare. Staff respond quickly if it does occur. Pupils generally behave well at breaktimes and when moving around the school. However, during lessons, too many pupils become restless and stop learning. This is because their work is either confusing or too easy.

Pupils enjoy the before- and after-school clubs that have recently restarted. Leaders ensure that pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), have opportunities to take part in trips and events. However, these experiences are not linked well enough to the curriculum and pupils' learning.

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

Leaders and teachers do not understand how to plan and deliver an effective curriculum. In almost all subjects, including English and mathematics, the curriculum is poorly organised and not well thought through. Plans do not show what pupils should learn and in what order so that pupils build their knowledge and understanding over time.

Teachers are not given the appropriate training and support to develop their own subject knowledge so that they understand what they must teach and when. Pupils' learning is disjointed because teaching is not matched to their needs. This prevents pupils from learning and remembering as much as they should. For example, in geography, older pupils do not know the capital cities and countries that make up the United Kingdom. In mathematics, pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise facts and methods so that they deepen their learning.

Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those with SEND, do not achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics. They do not learn enough in subjects such as history, geography and science. This makes it difficult for them to make a good start in their education and to be ready for secondary school.

The reading curriculum is not planned or taught well enough. Phonics lessons are slow in pace and often include irrelevant activities. Reading books are not well matched to the sounds that pupils have learned. In addition, the weakest readers

are not given the support they need to advance their reading quickly. Consequently, pupils throughout the school do not learn to read as well as they should.

Pupils with SEND do not learn successfully. While their needs are often identified accurately and specialist external support is put in place, pupils with SEND still access the same poorly planned and taught curriculum as other pupils.

The early years curriculum lacks ambition. There is no planned approach as to how staff will develop children's knowledge, skills and understanding. This means that the gaps in children's knowledge appear at the very start of their education. Aside from these significant weaknesses, children are cared for and looked after well. They enjoy learning and playing in their own classroom and in the outside spaces.

Leaders and staff expect pupils to be considerate to others. Pupils understand the school rules and try to follow them. However, because most teaching is poorly planned and delivered, pupils struggle to stay on task during lessons. In the few subjects that are better planned and taught, such as music and physical education, pupils listen, concentrate well and learn more successfully.

Leaders provide opportunities to support pupils' personal and social development. While pupils enjoy taking part in the trips and experiences that leaders organise, these tend to be one-off events that are not connected to what pupils are learning. Leaders have recently planned a more structured and coherent curriculum to help pupils develop their understanding of the wider world beyond their own community and experiences. This is not in place across the school.

Governors and the trust know that some subjects are not well planned. They know that outcomes have been too low. However, they are not aware of the full extent of the weaknesses in the curriculum. They have not made sure that leaders work effectively with staff so that all aspects of the curriculum are well planned and taught.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make sure that all staff are trained to understand their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. Staff are vigilant and report any concerns in a timely manner. Leaders work well with external agencies to make sure that vulnerable pupils and their families receive the support they need.

While many aspects of the school's curriculum are weak, the curriculum supports safeguarding well. For example, pupils are taught how to keep safe online. Pupils are aware of the harm from inappropriate materials when they access the internet or use social media. Pupils know what to do if they are worried or concerned.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders must take urgent action to improve the wide-ranging weaknesses in the school's curriculum. Currently, this has little structure or coherence. Pupils, including those with SEND, are not able to build their knowledge and understanding well enough over time. Leaders must ensure that a well-planned curriculum is implemented without delay, and likewise, that teachers understand what pupils must learn in each subject and how pupils will build on previous learning in an ordered way.
- Leaders have not ensured that teachers have the subject knowledge that they need to deliver an effective curriculum for the age groups that they teach. Teachers have had too few opportunities to develop their own subject-specific knowledge and skills. Teachers do not plan teaching that supports pupils to gain the knowledge and understanding that they need to learn successfully. Leaders should ensure that the implementation of a high-quality curriculum goes hand in hand with appropriate professional development for all teaching staff.
- The reading curriculum is not fit for purpose. As a result, children in early years and pupils across the school do not develop the knowledge and skills that they need to become confident and fluent readers. Leaders should ensure that the reading curriculum includes a strong focus on the effective teaching of phonics, and equally, that teachers understand how to develop pupils' reading quickly, so that pupils throughout the school learn to read with confidence and understanding.
- There is no planned curriculum for early years. It is not clear how children's knowledge will be developed as they move from pre-school through to Reception Year. Many children leave early years with gaps in their knowledge, particularly in language development, reading, writing and early mathematics. Leaders must ensure that there is an appropriate curriculum that clearly sets out how children's knowledge and understanding will be built upon and secured. Leaders must check that the curriculum is implemented effectively so that children are ready to move into Year 1.
- Trustees, trust directors and governors do not have a secure understanding of the school's weaknesses. They know that outcomes have not been good enough, but are not aware that the curriculum is underdeveloped and not meeting the needs of pupils, including those with SEND. The trust must make sure that the newly formed local governing body holds leaders to account rigorously for how weaknesses in the quality of education are being addressed quickly and effectively.

It is strongly recommended that the school does not seek to appoint early career 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 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	143850
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10200547
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	214
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mike Bailey
Headteacher	Val Britnell
Website	www.thomaswhiteheadceacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Thomas Whitehead 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 March 2017.
- The school is an average-sized primary school. It is sponsored by the Diocese of St Albans Multi-Academy Trust. The trust delegates aspects of governance to the local governing body. The board of trustees is the accountable body.
- The school manages a pre-school on site that provides for funded two-year-olds.
- Children in Nursery mostly attend part time. Reception children attend full time.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average.
- The proportions of pupils with SEND and those with an education, health and care plan are both above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above the national average.

Information about this inspection

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

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.

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- During this inspection, inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, two assistant headteacher (one of whom is also the designated safeguarding lead), the special educational needs coordinator and the school business manager. Inspectors also met with several teachers and teaching assistants to discuss the impact of the support they receive from leaders.
- The lead inspector met with governors, including the chair of the local governing body. Additionally, the lead inspector met with the chair of trustees, the chief executive officer and other representatives from the trust.
- Inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, geography, and music. Inspectors met with curriculum leaders for these subjects, visited lessons, looked at a range of pupils' work and met with teachers and pupils. Inspectors observed some pupils reading to staff and talked to pupils about their reading habits. Inspectors also checked the curriculum provision and pupils' learning in other subject areas during the second day of the inspection.
- Inspectors met with two groups of pupils to seek their views about the school. Inspectors also spoke to pupils informally in class and around the school at breaktimes. An inspector attended a school assembly.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's website and a range of school documents, including the school's own evaluation, improvement plans, curriculum plans, minutes of governing body meetings and records about behaviour, safeguarding children and attendance.
- Inspectors considered the 14 responses made by parents and carers to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the 14 responses to Ofsted's free-text system. Inspectors also spoke to some parents at the start of the school day. Additionally, inspectors took account of the 13 responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff and the 13 responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils.

Inspection team

Fiona Webb, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Neil Taggart

Ofsted Inspector

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