

Inspection of a good school: St Matthews Church of England Academy

Lightwood Road, Rough Close, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST3 7NE

Inspection date:

9 November 2021

Outcome

St Matthews Church of England Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at St Matthews are happy and confident and behave well. They are proud to attend and love learning. This is reflected in their good attendance. The school's Christian values are at the heart of the school. Pupils enjoy collective worship in the school's on-site church. Pupils enjoy the roles they take in leading this, for example lighting candles or leading prayers.

Pupils know how to keep safe. Older pupils spoke maturely about the dangers of knife crime, gangs and exploitation and about keeping safe online. Bullying is rare but fallouts do happen. Pupils are supported to try to sort things out themselves. If they cannot, they will go to a trusted adult for help.

Staff have high expectations of pupils. The curriculum is well planned to help pupils gain new knowledge and learn about the world in which they live. Staff ensure that any pupil who needs extra help with learning gets the support they need. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve well because teachers think about ways to support their learning.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They told inspectors that the school has a family feel and is a 'small school with a big heart'.

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

The new executive headteacher has quickly and astutely identified the school's strengths and areas for development. Improvement plans are clear and have been shared with staff. Everyone is working together to improve the school.

Leaders have established a positive reading culture across the school. Pupils talk confidently about the stories they like to read. They enjoy reading a range of texts and know a range of authors. Staff read to pupils regularly.

Leaders have recently adapted the way they teach phonics. Phonics lessons are planned in a way that builds on what pupils can do. However, staff are not fully trained in the new approach. This means that some of the activity choices do not support pupils' learning as well and as quickly as they could. The books pupils read are well matched to the sounds they know.

The mathematics curriculum is well established. Staff have the expertise to teach mathematics well. They have high expectations of what pupils can do. The level of challenge is just right, as it enables pupils to think deeply but to also be successful. Pupils talk confidently about how the sequence of learning has supported them to make links in their learning. For example, pupils could talk about how their work on multiplication has supported their understanding of division. Pupils with SEND are well supported. They have additional sessions to support new learning. In the early years, children learn through well-structured lessons. Additional adults support pupils effectively.

The curriculum is carefully planned. Subject leaders have written plans that are ambitious and well-sequenced. The content that they want pupils to learn is clearly mapped out. Subject leaders are beginning to check what pupils can remember. However, some subject leaders do not yet check the impact of their work on pupils' knowledge sharply enough.

Children in the early years are developing their skills as independent learners. They play well together, making up their own games and role playing. For example, a group of children decided to open a 'scoot through café'. The children ordered food and made deliveries. This was linked to their topic of vehicles.

Leaders have thought carefully about how to promote pupils' personal development. Pupils are given a wide variety of roles and responsibilities. For example, the school has a head girl and a head boy and house captains, and all Year 6 pupils are buddies for the younger pupils. One pupil said, 'We help the younger ones to feel happy and safe... and we help them to make the right choices.' Pupils said that before the pandemic they took part in lots of clubs. The pupils are looking forward to when the full range starts up again.

The new 'positive behaviour policy' is supporting the few pupils who find making the right decisions hard. It is designed to help pupils make the right choices. As a result, behaviour is improving for the few who struggle.

Staff are proud to work at the school. Leaders are mindful of workload and put practical measures in place to support this. An example is how subject leaders used a staff meeting to work on their subject development plans.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know their pupils very well and are quick to pick up on any concerns. Staff are well trained in identifying those pupils who may be at risk of neglect and abuse. Families who need help and support get it. Staff work well with external agencies, including social care and the police.

Leaders have ensured that appropriate checks are in place to make sure that the adults who work in the school are suitable to work with children and pupils. Trustees are aware of their responsibilities to keep pupils safe. They have ensured there is no attitude of complacency.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff who teach early reading have not had the appropriate training in the new phonics scheme. This means that some activities and approaches do not help the pupils to learn to read quickly enough. Leaders need to ensure that staff are well trained in the teaching of early reading so that they can help pupils to learn and apply their knowledge more quickly.
- Some subject leaders do not have the expertise to be able to effectively monitor and evaluate the impact of their work sharply enough. This means that they do not yet know how well their plans are supporting pupils' learning. Senior leaders need to ensure that all subject leaders have the expertise to be able to effectively measure the impact of their work and how it supports pupils to know and remember more.

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 evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Matthews CofE (A) Primary School, to be good in July 2011.

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	140299
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10200245
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	90
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Dr Alison Primrose
Headteacher	Karen Taylor (Executive Headteacher)
Website	www.stmatthews.stoke.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	18 October 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, the school has opened a Nursery for three-year-olds.
- The school operates a before- and after-school club that is run by the school.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school 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.
- The inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, subject leaders, and other members of staff. Inspectors also met with trustees, members of the local governing body and the chief executive officer of St Chad's Academies Trust.
- Meetings were held with curriculum leaders, class teachers and the special educational needs coordinator.
- Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead, examined school records, and discussed safeguarding cases.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum

plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the views of staff in Ofsted's online survey.
- Inspectors also spoke with pupils informally during breaktimes and observed pupils playing.

Inspection team

Eve Morris, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Chris Wright

Ofsted Inspector

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