

Inspection of a good school: St Andrew's CofE VC Lower School

Brunts Lane, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, SG18 0LY

Inspection dates:

18 and 19 November 2021

Outcome

St Andrew's CofE VC Lower School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending St Andrew's. Across both sites, they talk excitedly about their learning and how much they enjoy their subjects. Pupils like their teachers. They say that teachers make learning interesting and challenging. Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations and achieve well across the curriculum.

Pupils feel safe and happy. Behaviour in lessons and around both sites is good. Pupils say that bullying is very rare. Pupils are well cared for. They are confident to share their feelings, problems and worries with staff. Pupils trust staff to help resolve any problems or concerns, whether big or small.

Even though it is a large school, it is a friendly, caring place. Newcomers and visitors are made to feel welcome. Pupils show kindness towards adults and each other. They believe everyone should be treated equally and fairly.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, pupils enjoyed a wide range of clubs, activities and trips that allowed them to follow and develop their interests. Pupils understand why changes have had to be made because of COVID-19 and enjoy the activities that are still available.

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

Leaders have continued to develop the curriculum despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have designed a curriculum that provides pupils with a broad and interesting education. Pupils on both sites receive the same quality of care and education.

Leaders have thought carefully about what they want pupils to learn in each subject. This starts in the Reception classes. Leaders ensure that important knowledge is built upon from one year to the next. However, leaders have not shared this information clearly with parents. Some parents do not know what their children will learn each year.

Teachers have the knowledge they need to teach the full range of subjects. They teach important subject content in a logical order. Teachers usually explain things well and spot quickly when pupils have misunderstandings. Where this happens well, pupils are helped to use what they already know to deepen their understanding of new concepts and ideas.

Occasionally, teachers do not identify precisely enough what pupils need to learn step by step to understand more complex knowledge. When this happens, the activities teachers have chosen do not help pupils learn and remember what was intended. Overall, however, pupils achieve well.

Leaders have made reading a priority. Children in Reception are introduced to books, stories, and rhymes from the very start. Pupils enjoy the books that teachers read to them in class. They say that the books have interesting ideas that they discuss and learn more about. Pupils enjoy reading in school and at home.

Staff have the expertise to teach reading and phonics effectively. Pupils use their phonic knowledge to read and spell unfamiliar words. Leaders ensure that pupils can read a range of books matched to the sounds that they know. Pupils learn to read different text types accurately and with understanding. Staff quickly spot pupils who fall behind with their reading. Pupils get the help that they need to catch up.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well. The specialist SEND staff identify and know pupils' individual needs. Teachers use information to adapt their teaching to meet pupils' needs and help pupils with SEND build successfully on what they know and can do. Pupils who are part of the specialist speech and language provision get very effective support, that links to their individual needs and what they are learning in class.

For a small number of pupils with more complex social, emotional and mental health needs, leaders are tenacious in getting suitable support from outside agencies. Leaders identify and put in place the right provision for these pupils. Leaders share the frustration of a small number of parents with how long this can take.

In lessons, pupils are attentive and eager to participate. Adults in Reception show children how to learn, play and speak with one another. Time is used effectively for learning in all classes.

Leaders ensure that pupils learn about and discuss important values. Pupils are kind, caring and responsible members of the school community. Pupils know why it is important to respect difference and learn about other cultures.

Leaders are considerate of staff well-being and workload. Staff feel valued, as their views are heard and acted upon. Governors know the school well. They know that some communication with parents could be better. Governors ensure that leaders' actions aim to improve the quality of provision for all pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are alert to the signs that a pupil is at risk of harm. They have regular training. Staff report concerns promptly and appropriately. Leaders act quickly to respond to concerns. They ensure that pupils get the help they need to keep them safe from harm, involving outside agencies when needed.

Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures follow the latest guidance. Checks to ensure that adults are suitable to work in school are carried out diligently.

Pupils learn about and can recognise a range of risks. They have a good understanding of how to stay safe online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers, occasionally, do not break down important knowledge into smaller parts to help pupils to learn new, more complex ideas. Sometimes, teachers do not plan activities that are effective in helping pupils learn and remember these smaller pieces of knowledge. Leaders should ensure that all teachers identify precisely the component knowledge that pupils need to learn and use this to plan activities that help pupils to remember this knowledge and build to more complex knowledge.
- Some parents want more information about what their children will learn and how well they are doing. Sometimes, parents have to chase for responses to queries. This means some parents feel less well informed about aspects of the school's work. Leaders have identified this as an area for improvement. Leaders should ensure that the actions they are implementing improve all aspects of communication with parents without adding to staff workload.

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 school to be good in June 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	109595
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10199727
Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	774
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Sally Wells
Headteacher	Sue Rolfe
Website	www.standrewslowerschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 May 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Andrew's Voluntary Controlled Lower School is much larger than the average-sized primary school. It is a lower school. Pupils leave at the end of Year 4 and complete the primary phase of their education in other schools.
- At the time of the previous section 8 inspection, due to an increase in pupil numbers in the town, the school had opened a second site. The school continues to operate over two sites. The west site is located in Brunts Lane, Biggleswade. The east site is located at Bantock Way, Biggleswade, SG18 8UQ. The headteacher works over both sites. At each site there is a senior leader known as the head of site.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school is below average. The proportion of pupils with SEND in receipt of an education, health and care (EHC) plan is above average. The proportion of pupils with SEND who do not have an EHC plan is also above average.
- The school provides specialist speech and language provision on the west site for up to eight pupils. These pupils are placed in the school by the local authority and are registered as pupils at the school.
- The religious character of the school was inspected under section 48 of the Education Act (2005) in June 2016 and was judged to be good.

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.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the early years leaders and the special educational needs coordinators who work in the school. The lead inspector met with members of the governing body. Inspectors had telephone conversations with a local authority representative and representative of the Diocese of St Albans.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, physical education and personal, social, health and economic education. Inspectors 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.
- 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 and heads of site to discuss their work 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 gathered pupils' view by speaking to groups of pupils and speaking to pupils in lessons. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey. Inspectors reviewed responses to the school's own pupil survey.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the school day and considered the 112 responses and 78 free-text responses submitted to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of teaching and non-teaching staff. Inspectors took account of responses to the school's own staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.

Inspection team

Paul Wilson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Adam Cooke

Her Majesty's Inspector

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