

Inspection of a good school: John Donne Church of England Primary School

High Street, Blunham, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK44 3NL

Inspection date: 9 February 2022

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a happy, friendly school where pupils feel valued. They feel safe because staff and their friends care for them. Pupils say that bullying is rare, but when it does happen staff deal with it quickly. Pupils speak confidently about the school's Christian values and take them seriously. They told us, 'Our values help us to develop into kind and helpful people.'

Pupils understand how they are expected to behave. They work hard in lessons and play happily together at breaktimes. Pupils are keen to learn. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive. Everyone wants the best for the pupils. This has resulted in some positive changes across the school. However, there is more work to do to develop the curriculum so that all pupils achieve as well as they should.

Pupils enjoy the range of lunchtime and after-school clubs on offer, such as football, construction, netball and art. They recognise that visits, such as to Mountfitchet Castle and Shuttleworth, enrich their learning. Pupils enjoy their lessons in the school grounds. They say that the practical activities support them to 'learn team skills and understand how to look after the environment'.

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

Leaders understand the most important things the school needs to do to improve. Since joining the school in September 2021, the interim executive headteacher and interim acting headteacher have taken some effective actions to improve standards. Leaders have introduced changes to curriculum plans in most subjects to help ensure pupils' learning is more successful.

Many curriculum improvements, such as in mathematics and history, are at an early stage of development and are not yet fully in place. This means that teaching is not consistently

effective across the school. Subject leaders do not always have strong subject knowledge. Consequently, they are not able to support teachers well enough to plan and deliver effective lessons. Subject leaders do not have a clear picture of how well the curriculum in their subject is enabling pupils to learn successfully.

Leaders are committed to improving reading, including phonics, across the school. Leaders have chosen a new structured programme to teach phonics right from the start when children join the early years. Pupils practise the phonic knowledge and skills they are learning using books that are well matched to their level. Any pupils falling behind get the extra help they need so that they can catch up quickly. Leaders have purchased a richer range of books to help develop pupils' love of reading. Despite recent improvements, the teaching of reading is not yet consistently strong throughout all year groups. This means that some pupils are not as confident and fluent in their reading as they should be.

Leaders have high expectations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils' needs are identified early and accurately, and support for pupils is provided. However, because leaders' intended curriculum is not fully in place, some pupils with SEND, like some other pupils in the school, do not learn as successfully as they could.

Leaders make sure that teachers have consistent expectations about how pupils should behave. Pupils respond well to their teachers' instructions. Lessons include opportunities for pupils to discuss and share their ideas with each other.

Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to learn to be active and considerate citizens. Pupils contribute to the local community and raise funds for charities. They are keen to learn more about views, beliefs and opinions that are different from their own.

Governors are committed to support the school to get better. However, until recently, governors have not challenged leaders with the necessary rigour regarding the quality of education and the outcomes that pupils achieve. Nor have the governing body monitored the impact of leaders' actions closely enough in order to check that the school continues to improve.

The school is undergoing a transition. In addition to the curriculum changes, there has been the inevitable disruption caused by COVID-19. Some staff absence has also contributed to turbulence. However, staff have responded positively to leaders' raised expectations. Staff feel well supported by leaders and understand the reasons for the changes being made. Staff are motivated to play their part in moving the school forward.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspectors agreed that the impact of the school's curriculum on pupils' achievement may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff have a shared understanding that the safeguarding of pupils is everyone's responsibility. All staff receive regular training so that they know what to look

out for and how to act on any concerns. Leaders check that staff report and record any concerns according to the school's agreed procedures. Leaders work effectively with other agencies to ensure that pupils and their families receive the support that they need.

The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to understand how to keep themselves safe in different situations, for example when they are walking near roads, cycling, or when they are online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Subject leaders have not developed the subject-specific knowledge and skills to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively. They do not provide teachers with the guidance needed to plan and deliver an effective curriculum for all pupils. Senior leaders should provide further training so that subject leaders increase their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they lead. This will enable subject leaders to support teachers to deliver the intended curriculum consistently across the school. Additionally, subject leaders need to check that the curriculum for their subject is enabling pupils to learn successfully and achieve well over time.
- Leaders have strengthened the teaching of reading, including phonics. However, the revised reading curriculum is not fully in place across the school. Leaders need to ensure that teachers continue to receive training so that there is a consistent, high-quality approach to the teaching of reading, including phonics. This will support pupils in all year groups to become confident and fluent readers.
- Governors do not have a sufficient understanding of the school's effectiveness. They do not hold leaders to account for the quality of education that pupils receive. Governors need to develop a more structured and systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation. This will enable governors to challenge and support leaders about all aspects of the school's provision. In particular, governors need to assure themselves that the school's curriculum is ambitious and enables pupils to achieve well in all subjects.

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, John Donne Church of England Lower School, to be good in March 2012.

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	109615
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10211172
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Lee Larcombe
Headteacher	Victoria Morrall (Interim Executive Headteacher) Kate Hall (Acting Headteacher)
Website	www.johndonne.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 January 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- John Donne Church of England Primary School 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.
- In September 2017, the school became John Donne Church of England Primary School. This followed the extension of the former John Donne Lower School to include Year 5 and Year 6 pupils.
- The interim executive headteacher and interim acting headteacher were appointed in September 2021 for the current academic year. They are also the headteacher and deputy headteacher of another local school. Between them, they spend three days a week at John Donne Church of England Primary School.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- During this inspection, the inspectors held meetings with the interim executive headteacher, who is also the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), one of the assistant headteachers and the school secretary. The interim acting headteacher was absent from school on the day of the inspection.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with the chair of the governing body and two other governors. Additionally, the lead inspector held a phone conversation with a local authority adviser to discuss their work with the school.
- The inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and history. The inspectors met with curriculum leaders for these subjects, visited lessons, looked at a range of pupils' work and met with teachers and pupils. The lead inspector observed some pupils reading to staff and talked to pupils about their reading habits. The inspectors also checked the curriculum provision and pupils' learning in other subject areas.
- The inspectors met with several groups of pupils to seek their views about the school. The inspectors also spoke to pupils informally in class and around the school at breaktimes.
- To check leaders' management of safeguarding, the lead inspector spoke with the headteacher, who is also the designated safeguarding leader. The lead inspector reviewed the single central record and records related to behaviour and safeguarding incidents. The inspector considered the school's processes for reporting safeguarding concerns. Both inspectors spoke with pupils, staff and governors to check their views on safeguarding.
- The inspectors scrutinised the school's website and a range of school documents, including the school's own evaluation, improvement plans and minutes of governing body meetings.
- The inspectors considered the 40 responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the 38 responses to Ofsted's free-text system. There were no responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and Ofsted's online pupil survey.

Inspection team

Fiona Webb, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Daniel Gee

Ofsted Inspector

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