

Inspection of a good school: Belchamp St Paul Church of England Primary School

Vicarage Road, Belchamp St Paul, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 7BP

Inspection dates:

10 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?

Belchamp St Paul is a very small, rural primary school. There are four mixed-age classes. The key stage 1 class and the Reception class work very closely together. The school has a 'family' feel where everyone knows everyone.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They love playing with, and taking care of, their school pets. The budgies, guinea pigs and the school dog are key members of the school community. Pupils also enjoy learning and playing with their friends in the plentiful outdoor spaces. Pupils know the school's rules and they behave well. They are well mannered, polite, thoughtful and considerate.

The school has been through some difficult times, but is now improving once again. Leaders' expectations of pupils are increasing. As a result, pupils are starting to achieve more, and to learn the curriculum better. Pupils are ready for secondary school by the time they reach the end of Year 6.

Pupils feel safe at school. Bullying is something that happens very rarely. Pupils know that they can always talk to any of the adults in school if they are worried about something. They trust that adults will sort things out if problems arise.

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

Leaders have ensured that pupils are provided with a suitably broad and balanced education. On the whole, pupils learn the curriculum well. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education. However, the curriculum is not consistently strong across the range of national curriculum subjects.

Leaders identified that there were weaknesses in the curriculum prior to this inspection. In some subjects, the content of the curriculum had not been thought through well enough, in terms of what should be taught, when and why. Leaders have started to take action to improve this. For example, they have purchased commercial schemes of work in some subjects, including history and geography. These actions have improved the quality of the curriculum, but there is more to do.

Assessment is also better developed in some subjects than others. For example, in mathematics, assessment is appropriate and regular. It helps to identify gaps in pupils' learning and where additional input is needed. In geography, where curriculum improvements are more recent, assessment is less well developed.

The curriculum is not delivered consistently well. There is variation between classes and across subjects. Where there are weaknesses in the curriculum, and teaching is less strong, there is a small amount of low-level disruption. For example, pupils are sometimes slow to settle or to pay attention when the teacher addresses the class. This is because expectations of pupils are sometimes too low, both in terms of what pupils can achieve and how they should behave.

Leaders recognise the vital importance of reading. They have made recent changes to improve the quality of the phonics curriculum and how well it is delivered. For example, they are providing ongoing training and support to ensure that all staff teach phonics well. Leaders have identified a new systematic synthetic phonics programme for the school, and are in the process of introducing it. They are also currently purchasing reading books that are matched with the chosen phonics programme.

Pupils learn to read quickly and well. For example, children in the Reception class have already learned a wide range of letters, and groups of letters, that represent sounds. They blend these together accurately to read words. Pupils in key stage 1 read at a level that is appropriate to their age. Where pupils struggle to learn to read, they are given suitable support to enable them to catch up quickly.

Leaders have improved the way provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is managed. Leaders know these pupils and their individual needs very well. Leaders ensure that pupils with SEND receive appropriate support that enables them to achieve well.

The school provides a range of clubs. Older pupils run groups at lunchtimes, including clubs about art, cartoons and Harry Potter. A separately registered, external company provides before- and after-school care on the school site, as well as a further range of clubs. Pupils are given the opportunity to go on educational visits, both locally and further afield. Leaders were quick to get these visits up and running again as soon as the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were eased. For example, pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 went on a residential visit to an outward-bound centre in the Brecon Beacons in September 2021.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspectors agreed that curriculum development and delivery may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school has a robust safeguarding culture. Relationships between pupils and staff are strong. Pupils know that they can speak to any adult at school if they are ever worried about anything. Staff receive regular training to ensure that they know what to do if they are concerned about a child. They record their concerns in a timely fashion, using the school's online system. The designated safeguarding leads are well trained for the role. They take decisive and appropriate action in response to concerns, where necessary. The school's single central record of pre-appointment checks meets requirements and is up to date.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum is not fully developed. In some subjects, the content of curriculum has not been thoroughly thought through. The curriculum is not sufficiently progressive and well sequenced in these subjects. As a result, pupils do not learn as much about some subjects as they should. Leaders should take action to ensure that there is a well-planned, well-sequenced and progressive curriculum in place for all subjects, including phonics and early reading.
- The curriculum is not delivered consistently well across classes and subjects. Teachers' expectations, of what pupils can do and how they should behave, are sometimes too low. Where this is the case, pupils do not achieve as well as they should and there is a small amount of low-level disruptive behaviour in classes. Leaders should ensure that all staff have the knowledge and skills they need in order to teach the full curriculum well. Leaders should also ensure that all staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and how they should behave.

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, also called Belchamp St Paul CofE Primary, to be good in April 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	144866
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10212042
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	69
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael Ferguson
Headteacher	Danielle O'Connell
Website	www.belchampstpaulschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school converted to become an academy on 1 August 2017. When its predecessor school, also called Belchamp St Paul CofE Primary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school joined the Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust, a multi-academy trust of 23 primary schools, on the day it converted to become an academy.
- The school has a Christian religious character. It is a Church of England school.
- The headteacher took up her post in September 2021. She was previously head of school, under an executive headteacher, from January 2020. The headteacher has a teaching commitment that is the equivalent of two days per week.

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.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders, representatives of the Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trust, the trust's intervention board, staff and pupils.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors met with the school's designated safeguarding lead, checked the school's single central record of recruitment and vetting checks, looked at safeguarding records, and spoke with pupils and staff.
- Inspectors spoke with parents as they brought their children to school. They took account of 15 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. Inspectors also considered the 27 responses to Ofsted Parent View and the same number of free-text comments from parents.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Hannah Stoten

Her Majesty's Inspector

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