

Inspection of a good school: St Mark's Church of England Primary School, Eccles

Eccles Row, Eccles, Aylesford, Kent ME20 7HS

Inspection dates:

22 March 2022

Outcome

St Mark's Church of England Primary School, Eccles continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Mark's is a happy and welcoming place. Pupils enjoy their learning and work hard in their lessons. As one parent enthused, 'My son bounces into school and comes out so happy, with lots to share about his day'.

Pupils here really enjoy school life and are especially friendly and respectful towards each other. Any form of unkindness or poor behaviour is rare. Older pupils take pride in being 'guardian angels' and supporting younger children in Reception to settle into school life. Pupils feel safe in school and know that adults will listen and take action should they have any worries.

Leaders have raised the level of challenge on offer across the curriculum and have high expectations of all pupils. They know that there is further work to do in some subject areas. Building on existing strengths, they have maintained a key focus upon ensuring that learning is not something that just happens in the classroom. Pupils relish the chance to enrich and deepen their learning outdoors in the school's extensive grounds. Similarly, they benefit from a rich selection of after-school clubs and participation in themed weeks such as history explorer's week, enterprise week and participation in art competitions. The curriculum helps to prepare pupils well for their future learning.

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

Despite the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, senior leaders have worked with the Pilgrim Multi Academy Trust to re-organise subject leadership and revitalise the curriculum. Each subject has a 'Pilgrims Progress' pathway planned from Reception through to the end of key stage 2. Currently, these focus on how pupils develop important skills. Leaders know this curriculum planning is not quite where they want it to be. They are working to add the precise details of the knowledge they want pupils to learn at each stage over the coming months and strengthening how well some subjects are led.

Nevertheless, teachers typically demonstrate strong subject knowledge and deliver learning well across most subjects. They plan together and discuss what to teach and seek to sequence the content they teach to pupils. Strong examples of this collaborative planning were seen in geography. As a result, older pupils could confidently recall their prior learning about volcanoes in previous years and recognise how their current learning is building upon their knowledge.

Leaders give a high priority to promoting early reading and ensuring that pupils become confident, fluent readers. Work to improve the teaching of reading and ensure fidelity to one scheme for teaching phonics is paying off, particularly for the youngest pupils. Very effective phonics teaching starts straight away in Reception. Phonics is taught in a largely consistent and systematic way so that most pupils read well by the end of key stage 1. Children soon learn to love books. However, some pupils do not read books that match exactly the sounds they know. The small number of weaker readers do not re-read and practise their decodable books and/or have sufficient experience of a range of age-appropriate books being read to them frequently enough. This prevents them from making swifter progress.

Strong leadership of the teaching in mathematics ensures that the curriculum is well thought out from Reception upwards and teaching is consistently meeting the needs of the pupils. Teachers are skilled at using approaches to make sure that pupils really understand what they are learning. Pupils enjoy mathematics and are proud to be able to apply their skills to their learning in other subjects.

Skilled leadership of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) ensures that these pupils learn well in the school. The special educational needs coordinator ensures that their needs are carefully identified, and their progress is tracked well. Teachers and teaching assistants work together using a range of effective strategies that help pupils with SEND to learn well alongside their peers.

Strong relationships exist between parents and staff, and face-to-face communication is warm and welcoming. Leaders have introduced a range of different methods to communicate key written messages and information to parents. Some parents report that having different systems to do this can be frustrating. Leaders need to simplify communication systems with parents to address this.

Pupils' behaviour at school is of a very high standard. They play happily with their peers at lunch and break times, are considerate of others and are polite. Pupils value the school's rewards and routines and so any disruption during lessons is rare. The school equips pupils to become enthusiastic learners with communication skills and confidence. In addition, pupils are nurtured to develop genuine respect and empathy for each other and others in the wider community. They are well prepared for their next stage of education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that all staff receive regular and appropriate training on safeguarding. The school has a culture of vigilance and staff are alert to signs that something may be wrong. Systems are in place to record and share any concerns staff may have. Trustees regularly review safeguarding practices to make sure that they meet requirements and work for pupils.

The records kept by the headteacher show that the school responds in an appropriate and timely way when necessary. Leaders work with external agencies when required to ensure pupils get the help they need. Pupils say they feel safe here and all parents confirm this.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The pandemic has hindered the completion of leaders' plans to improve the curriculum in science and some foundation subjects. Here, more work needs to be done to identify and sequence the key knowledge pupils need to know and by when. Pupils' learning is therefore not fully maximised. However, it is clear from leaders' actions that they are making the necessary amendments. For this reason, the transitional arrangements have been applied. Leaders should ensure that they identify the exact content teachers need to deliver and how this knowledge will accumulate over time.
- Support for some of the weakest readers is not organised as well as it needs to be. Consequently, some pupils who struggle to gain fluency do not progress swiftly enough. Leaders need to make sure that these pupils regularly practise their reading skills using books that are precisely matched to the sounds that they know, as well as experiencing a wider range of texts.
- Leaders have implemented a variety of different systems to communicate key messages and information to parents. Some parents report that they find having different systems and portals confusing and are frustrated when they miss out on information. Leaders need to streamline their systems of communication and ensure that all parents can access the information that they need.

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 first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, also called St Mark's Church of England Primary School, to be good in October 2015.

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	145081
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10203160
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	122
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mark Wilkes
Headteacher	Jonathan Bassett
Website	www.st-marks-aylesford.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Mark's Church of England Primary School converted to become an academy school in November 2017, joining The Pilgrim Multi Academy Trust.
- The last section 48 inspection took place in 2017. The next section 48 inspection is due soon and leaders have made arrangements for this to take place in due course.
- The school runs a breakfast club for pupils who attend the 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.
- Deep dives were conducted in early reading, mathematics and geography. As part of these, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited lessons, talked to pupils about their work and met with teaching staff to talk about their approach to designing and delivering the curriculum.

- To complete the evaluation of the quality of education, inspectors also considered the curriculum in other subjects, spoke with the SENCo and visited additional lessons to gather evidence about provision for pupils with SEND.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, subject leaders and other members of teaching and support staff. The lead inspector met with the co-chair of the local governing body, trustees and the CEO of the Pilgrim Multi Academy Trust.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's policies and practices and met with safeguarding leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding. Records of safeguarding incidents were scrutinised and discussed. Inspectors also reviewed the school records of the recruitment checks made on adults working in the school. The views of pupils, parents and staff represented in meetings, and the responses to Ofsted surveys were considered.
- Inspectors held informal conversations with pupils at lunch and break time to gather their views about different aspects of the school, and held conversations with a number of parents at the school gate.

Inspection team

Matthew Newberry, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Debbie Bennett

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates:
<http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2022