

# Inspection of Huxley Church of England Primary School

Church Lane, Huxley, Chester, Cheshire CH3 9BH

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Inspection dates: 10 and 11 March 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Inadequate**

The quality of education

**Inadequate**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Inadequate**

Early years provision

**Inadequate**

Previous inspection grade

Good

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils' best educational interests do not sit at the heart of this school. They have been let down by the fractured relationships between leaders and governors. The misguided oversight of governors has overshadowed and hindered the school's development. Ineffective governance and a lack of leadership capacity beyond the headteacher mean that pupils' learning is stifled. Their academic achievement is poor. This is true for all age groups, including children in early years, irrespective of whether they attend school on a full- or flexi-time basis.

Pupils are happy and settled at school. They enjoy the opportunities to work and play in the extensive school grounds. They behave well. Pupils trust staff. They know that staff will look after them and listen to their worries. Pupils feel safe and free from bullying. Staff act quickly to stop harmful behaviours.

Pupils' attitudes to learning do not match their good conduct. Staff are increasing their expectations of what pupils should accomplish in lessons. However, some pupils still lack a desire to do their best and to work hard.

Pupils are friendly, sociable and comfortable in the company of their classmates and adults. Many are very articulate. They can present their views about topical issues, such as the conflict in Ukraine, clearly and with conviction. They accept the differences between themselves and others, or alternative opinions, with respect and good grace.

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

In many ways, Huxley is a new school. Over half of the staff and almost all of the pupils started school in, or after, September 2021. Many pupils have not been educated at school before. However, the care and support of staff mean that this is a cohesive pupil community. Pupils follow routines and get on well with each other. Their courteous behaviour means that learning time is not interrupted. No one fears being called names because of how they look, act or view the world. Although improving, some pupils do not make the most of their learning time. They sometimes opt out or fail to take pride in their work.

Pupils are beginning to gain traction in their knowledge of English and mathematics. This is because the new curriculums in these subjects are carefully organised to aid pupils' progress. Staff have used assessment strategies appropriately to identify pupils' starting points, so that the curriculum is enabling them to gain basic skills and knowledge. It is still early days for these subjects, but the groundwork is in place.

Children in early years, and pupils throughout the school, are benefiting from a suitable phonics programme. Although many pupils find reading difficult, they are learning and remembering sounds so that they can tackle unfamiliar words. Pupils practise reading often, using books that match the sounds that they know. Even so,

many are still in the early stages of reading fluently. While some pupils are becoming avid readers, others are less enthusiastic. Teachers have not been wholly successful in finding the key to unlock all pupils' desire to read for pleasure.

The curriculums for subjects other than reading, writing and mathematics lack substance. Too little thought has been given to what pupils must learn and when this knowledge should be taught. While there are overarching goals for each subject, no one understands the small steps that pupils need to take in their journey towards success. Staff fill this void with disconnected activities that fail to build a secure foundation for future learning. Pupils remember little of what they have been taught unless it has particularly piqued their interest. They are unable to connect earlier learning when something new is introduced.

Pupils' poor progress through these curriculums is compounded further because staff are ill equipped to meet the demands of teaching mixed-age classes. In lieu of any curriculum guidance, staff opt for the middle ground, regardless of what pupils already know or what they need to learn. Teachers lack the subject knowledge and expertise to teach the full range of subjects to the pupils in their care. While staff seek to check pupils' learning, their efforts make little difference. As staff are unaware of what pupils should learn, they do not know what to assess. This means that, in most subjects, gaps are not identified and misconceptions are not resolved.

The learning needs of children in early years have been cut adrift. There is no curriculum in place for most areas of learning. Instead, children follow the key stage 1 national curriculum, meaning that they miss out on the crucial building blocks that are essential for later success. Those pupils who attend school full time are disadvantaged more than others. This is because their diet on the two days that are not flexi-core days lacks structure, thought or purpose. They tread water.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) fare no worse or no better than others in the school. Their needs are identified accurately and they enjoy close support and nurture from adults in lessons. However, the weaknesses in the curriculum mean that they do not achieve as well as they should.

Leaders have established a programme to promote pupils' personal development, but it is not followed closely enough by staff. As a result, pupils do not gain a deep enough insight into the key ingredients that are essential for a healthy and happy life. They are taught about the different faiths, cultures and families that make up modern Britain, but this learning often slips their minds.

There is a stark difference in the attendance of full-time pupils and those who are flexi-schooled. On average, flexi-school pupils only attend for two out of their three core days. This limits their achievement even further.

Governors have lost sight of their core purpose. They have become embroiled in minutiae, which in turn has led to a broken relationship with leaders and staff. They have failed to fulfil many of their statutory duties. Their attitudes to safeguarding are lax, as is their attention to key policies and procedures to ensure that pupils gain the

most from school. Their misplaced oversight has hampered the headteacher's efforts to move the school forward.

Staff feel well supported by the headteacher and appreciate that their workload is considered when introducing change. Staff are on board and keen to improve the school. However, too much responsibility rests on the shoulders of the headteacher. She fulfils almost every role within the school. While she has brought about some positive change, the lack of capacity across the rest of the staff means that all pupils are dealt a poor hand in terms of their education.

Most of the parents and carers who shared their views are positive about the school. Many value the nurture and support that their children receive.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff, including those who are new to the school, have received relevant and up-to-date training. This means that they know the signs to look out for that might suggest a pupil is at risk of harm. The systems for reporting concerns are clear and understood. Leaders' records show that timely action is taken no matter how minor an issue might initially seem. Leaders keep a close eye on pupils' attendance and typically take suitable action to make sure that pupils are not missing from education before they are taken off roll.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. For example, they know some of the risks that can come to the fore when working and playing online.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The curriculums for subjects other than English and mathematics lack substance. Leaders have not thought about what pupils need to learn and the order in which this should be taught. As a result, pupils, including those with SEND, experience disconnected activities that do not build their learning over time. Leaders must ensure that they design and implement subject curriculums that enable pupils to gain the knowledge that they need to achieve success.
- Teachers lack the subject knowledge that they need to teach the national curriculum. They are ill equipped to design learning for pupils of different ages in their classes. This means that pupils do not build on their learning over time. Leaders must ensure that teachers are supported to improve their knowledge of different subjects. Leaders must also ensure that the curriculum enables teachers to meet the needs of pupils in mixed-age classes.
- The assessment strategies that teachers use for most subjects are ineffective. This is because teachers are uncertain what they should be checking. As a result, they are unsure about what pupils know and remember. Leaders must make sure

that, alongside their work to improve the curriculum, they pay equal attention to how pupils' learning will be assessed. In addition, leaders must ensure that staff are suitably trained to check pupils' learning and adapt their teaching so that pupils gain fluency and accuracy in their knowledge and understanding.

- There is no curriculum of any real worth for children in early years. As a result, they do not gain the essential foundations for later learning. They are not well prepared for Year 1. Leaders must ensure that they build a suitable curriculum that matches the minimum expectations for learning and development, as set out in the statutory framework for the early years foundation stage.
- Those pupils who attend school full time are disadvantaged. Too little account is taken of their learning on the two days each week when the flexi-school curriculum is not in operation. This impacts on their achievement. Leaders must review the curriculum offer that they provide for pupils who are in class every day of the week so that these pupils do not waste valuable learning time.
- Governance is ineffective. Governors do not know their core duties or fulfil their statutory responsibilities. Their actions have hindered the school's progress and contributed to the poor quality of education that pupils receive. Urgent action must be taken to ensure that governors gain an understanding of their role and build bridges with leaders and staff so that a united leadership team works together to move the school forward.
- The capacity to improve the school is poor. Almost every aspect of school life lies with the headteacher. This has slowed down the pace of change and led to considerable shortcomings in the school's provision. Leaders must ensure that other staff in the school have the knowledge, expertise and confidence to shoulder some of the load and contribute towards the school's recovery.

Leaders and those responsible for governance may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	111286
<b>Local authority</b>	Cheshire West and Chester
<b>Inspection number</b>	10212227
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary controlled
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	29
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Jo Copping
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rachel Gourley
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.huxleyprimary.cheshire.sch.uk">www.huxleyprimary.cheshire.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	15 October 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Huxley Primary is a Church of England school. Its most recent section 48 inspection took place in October 2017.
- Almost all pupils are electively home educated, but receive part of their education at school. They are registered on the school's roll. They are expected to attend school for three core days each week. A small proportion of pupils attend school full time.
- Pupils are taught in two classes. One class includes children in early years and pupils in Year 1 and Year 2. The other class caters for pupils from Years 3 to 6.
- Alternative provision is not used for any pupils.
- There has been considerable change to almost all aspects of the school since the previous inspection. Many staff, including the headteacher, are new to post. There has also been extensive churn in the membership of the governing body. A new chair of governors took up post very recently.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

This was the first routine inspection the school had 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 carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, music and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with the headteacher and one subject leader, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. An inspector also observed pupils from Year 1 to Year 3 reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also considered a number of other subjects on the school's curriculum. Inspectors talked to the headteacher, who leads these subjects. They also spoke with pupils and reviewed pupils' work.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and members of staff. The lead inspector spoke to four governors, including the chair of the governing body. The lead inspector also spoke with two representatives of the local authority and a representative of the Diocese of Chester.
- Inspectors spoke with different groups of pupils to gather their views of school, their learning and behaviour, and safety. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and during breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents through the responses to Ofsted Parent View. This included the comments received via the free-text facility. Inspectors also spoke to parents at the start of the school day. One inspector held a meeting with parents whose children attend the flexi-school provision. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's pupil and staff surveys.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation provided by school leaders, including the school development plan, minutes of governing body meetings and leaders' self-evaluation document. They also considered some additional evidence provided by members of the governing body.
- Inspectors checked the arrangements for keeping pupils safe. They reviewed documentation, checked attendance registers and spoke to governors, leaders, staff and pupils.

### **Inspection team**

Jo Olsson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Janette Walker

Her Majesty's Inspector



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