

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

Ramslye Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 8LN

Inspection dates:

28 and 29 June 2022

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff want what is best for pupils at St Mark's school. They have high aspirations for them to achieve and behave well. The school's Christian values of trust, friendship, and forgiveness, give pupils a strong basis from which to understand the world.

Pupils are safe and happy. They look forward to coming to school to see their friends and teachers. Bullying is very rare and dealt with effectively by staff if it does happen. Pupils are polite and respectful. They behave well in lessons and around the school. They enjoy each other's company during social times and support each other in the classroom. Pupils enjoy their learning and happily talk about their work. Children in the early years are excited to learn new things. They follow the rules and routines of the classroom carefully.

Pupils can choose from a wide range of interesting clubs to develop their interests and talents. However, some pupils do not take part in activities that could benefit them. The curriculum is further enriched by exciting trips and visiting speakers. For example, pupils explored the rainforest using virtual reality headsets. Pupils across the school enjoy reading and contributing to whole-class story time.

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

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum so that all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well. Curriculum plans are well ordered and identify key knowledge that pupils must know in each subject. Leaders make sure that pupils have opportunities to use previous learning to understand new information.

Subject leaders have the expert knowledge that they need to lead their subjects effectively. The curriculum in each subject prepares pupils well for their next stage of learning. For example, children in Reception can confidently use whiteboards and tablets to complete learning activities, ready for computing in Year 1. Pupils in Year 6 can explain

how their knowledge of fractions from Year 5 helps them to convert improper fractions. Leaders adapt curriculum plans effectively so that pupils with SEND enjoy success in their learning.

Leaders support teachers well to check what pupils know, understand and remember. In mathematics, for example, pupils revisit learning on 'flashback Fridays'. Teachers use assessment effectively to adapt plans and address gaps in learning.

Most pupils enjoy learning and work hard to do their best. In a small number of lessons, however, learning activities do not always challenge pupils as much as they should. For example, in some group activities, pupils wait for others to complete tasks. As a result, some pupils do not fully engage in their work.

Leaders know the value of reading. They have invested in expert training so that staff subject knowledge is strong. As a result, teachers follow the phonics scheme closely and with accuracy so that most pupils read well. Pupils who find it more difficult to read receive help to keep up. However, some support takes place outside of the classroom, meaning that new phonics learning is missed. The recently introduced 'reading race' encourages pupils in all phases to read further at home.

Children in the early years work and share nicely with each other. Leaders plan stimulating indoor and outdoor activities across the seven areas of learning. Children in Reception begin their reading journey as soon as they start school. They enjoy reading and contribute to their phonics lessons with enthusiasm. There are many opportunities for children to develop number skills through their play. For example, hiding monkeys in a bag to practise number bonds. Other children keep score for their friends who play hockey.

Pupils develop character and responsibility through leadership roles on the school council or eco committee. Leading Light ambassadors promote the school's Christian values and lead collective worship. The well-sequenced personal, social and health education programme enables pupils to develop resilience and confidence. Year 6 pupils say that they have the information and guidance they need to prepare for secondary school. Pupils know and accept that everyone is different. This is demonstrated by their willingness to include new pupils from overseas into their friendship groups.

Trips are well matched to the curriculum. A Year 3 visit to a local museum deepened pupils' understanding of the stone age, for example. There are clubs on offer to interest everyone, including coding, mindfulness and French clubs. Although clubs are free, and available for all, uptake of some is low. Leaders do not currently encourage those who might benefit the most to attend.

Staff feel valued by leaders, who have invested in their training and development. Leaders, including governors, are mindful of staff workload and well-being. They actively look for opportunities to reduce workload, for example, by changing assessment policies. Leaders are focused on improving the curriculum by developing staff expertise. Governors and leaders work together to address school priorities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained to identify any pupils who might be at risk. They know how to report concerns and are confident that leaders will take the right actions quickly. Leaders undertake appropriate checks on adults so that they know they are safe to work in the school. Leaders work with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families get the support they need.

The curriculum ensures that pupils have a strong understanding of how to keep themselves safe on and offline.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some lessons, pupils are not challenged in their learning as much as they could be. Leaders need to further enhance staff training and development so that teachers choose learning activities that help pupils to know and understand more.

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.

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	118613
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10207108
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary-aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	370
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair of governing body	David Hill
Headteacher	Simon Bird
Website	http://www.st-marks.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 January 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a voluntary-aided, Church of England School, within the Diocese of Rochester.
- The school runs a breakfast and after-school club.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID 19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector completed deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics and computing. This included meeting with subject leaders and talking with staff and pupils. The inspector also visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.

- The inspector scrutinised a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school and priorities for improvement. The inspector met with senior leaders, a selection of subject leaders, teachers, and support staff.
- During the inspection, the inspector spoke with a local authority school improvement advisor, and met with two members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- The arrangements for safeguarding were reviewed by scrutinising records, and through discussions with staff and pupils.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in class and at other times of the day.
- The views of pupils, parents, and staff were considered through discussions and a review of Ofsted's surveys.

Inspection team

Zoë Harris, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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