

Inspection of a good school: Russell Lower School

Queens Road, Ampthill, Bedfordshire MK45 2TD

Inspection dates:

3 and 4 November 2022

Outcome

Russell Lower School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are friendly and happy. They behave well, and this enables all the pupils to learn. Relationships between staff and pupils are respectful and positive. Pupils are accepting of each other's differences and interests. Leaders and staff have high expectations. Pupils behave well because they have clear routines and boundaries.

Pupils benefit from a broad curriculum that develops their interests. They are keen to share their knowledge and their ideas. Pupils enjoy talking about their learning and they show pride in their work. They understand that school is a place to work hard and they show positive attitudes to learning. Most pupils achieve well and are well prepared for when they move to middle school.

Pupils understand what bullying is. They say that bullying is rare, but that when it happens, there are clear consequences. Pupils are confident that all staff will help them if they need it.

Parents and carers are all very positive about the school. Pupils make good progress, and the school is a nurturing and caring environment for all pupils. Pupils develop their interests through a variety of trips and clubs. Pupils learn about local and worldwide concerns, such as pollution.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum that ensures that pupils learn the knowledge and skills they need in order to be ready for the next stage in their learning. Leaders have identified the important knowledge they want pupils to learn from Reception to Year 4. They have ordered this in a way that is logical and helps pupils to build on what they already know and can do.

In most subjects, staff have the knowledge required to teach the planned curriculum well. Adults regularly check pupils' learning in lessons. They address any misconceptions pupils

have. Pupils can use subject-specific language to explain their learning. Regular assessments help the staff to understand which pupils are not keeping up. A few teachers do not have as secure subject knowledge in a small number of curriculum areas. This means that occasionally, teachers plan activities that do not focus precisely on the intended learning.

Leaders and staff prioritise reading. Pupils enjoy reading and talk enthusiastically about books they like. Children start to learn to read from the very start in Reception. Staff have the expertise to teach reading and phonics consistently and well. Adults check regularly on pupils' phonics knowledge. Adults use these checks to provide extra help to pupils to help them keep up. However, some pupils read books that do not precisely match their phonics knowledge, making it harder for them to learn to read. However, most pupils become confident, fluent readers by the time they leave the school.

Leaders ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access the full curriculum. The special educational needs coordinator has close links with local nursery schools to make sure that pupils with SEND are identified as early as possible. Staff are trained to understand how to support different needs and how to adapt the curriculum when necessary. This helps most pupils with SEND to make strong progress in their learning.

Leaders promote pupils' wider development well. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about their interests and broader knowledge. For example, some pupils were concerned about pollution in the local area. They can link this concern to animals losing their habitats and then becoming extinct. Pupils develop their interests and aspirations for their future. Pupils understand that respecting and listening carefully to each other are important. A range of visits and visitors to the school complement the curriculum that pupils learn.

Staff value the support they get from leaders, particularly for well-being. They share the high ambitions that leaders and governors have for the pupils. Governors assure themselves that leaders' work to improve the school is making a positive difference for all pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff receive regular training so that their knowledge of safeguarding is relevant and up to date. Staff know how to spot that pupils need help or are at risk of harm. Leaders act promptly to ensure that pupils get the help they need. Leaders involve other agencies when appropriate to keep pupils safe from harm.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. They know how important it is to stay safe when online.

Governors assure themselves that safeguarding policies and procedures are robust. This includes ensuring that the checks required for adults working in the school are completed thoroughly.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils read books that are not closely matched to their phonics knowledge. This means that these pupils do not practise using their phonics knowledge. This means that they do not become accurate, fluent readers as quickly as they could. Leaders should ensure that adults use their assessments to ensure that all pupils are given books that are matched closely to their current phonics knowledge.
- In a few curriculum areas, some teachers are still developing their subject knowledge. This means that some teaching does not focus on the subject knowledge that curriculum leaders intend pupils to learn. Leaders should ensure that all teachers have the secure subject knowledge needed to plan activities that help pupils remember important subject knowledge.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 2011.

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.

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	109495
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10200314
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	449
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mr Richard Gallagher
Headteacher	Mrs Nicolette Walker
Website	www.russell-lower.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has three classes in each year group from Reception to Year 4. Pupils complete key stage 2 in middle schools.
- The school has expanded from two forms of entry to three forms of entry. This process began in 2015.
- The headteacher was new to the school at the time of the previous inspection in 2016.
- The chair of the governing body is new to this role and there are five new members of the governing body.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- 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.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and other school leaders to discuss the quality of education and safeguarding for pupils.

- The inspector met with the chair of the governing body and seven members of the governing body. The previous chair came to this meeting.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in early reading, geography and mathematics. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector reviewed the information that is published on the school website.
- The inspector had a phone conversation with the school's improvement partner.
- To evaluate the arrangements that are in place to safeguard pupils and staff, the inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead, considered school records and spoke with staff and pupils. The inspector scrutinised the single central record of pre-employment checks and school records.
- The inspector observed the pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. The inspector spoke with pupils to seek their views.
- The inspector considered the 178 responses to Ofsted Parent View, together with the free-text comments. Inspectors reviewed the 54 responses to the staff survey. They also considered the 65 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Jessie Linsley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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