

Inspection of a good school: St Mary the Virgin Church of England Primary School

Pheasant Way, Gillingham SP8 4GG

Inspection dates:

2 and 3 February 2023

Outcome

St Mary the Virgin Church of England Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to this school because learning is exciting. They are ambitious and like to be challenged. The school's 'Great 8' attitudes to learning help pupils to know how to learn well.

Pupils respond well to adults' high expectations. They listen respectfully to each other, making positive contributions to discussions. On the rare occasion that adults' expectations are not high enough, some pupils do not listen carefully, which affects their learning. Children in the early years follow routines well. They develop their ability to think critically and become independent.

Pupils in leadership roles are proud of the part they played in developing the new behaviour policy. Rewards and sanctions are clear to pupils. Pupils are committed to helping one another behave well through encouragement and inclusion. Bullying is rare. Any inappropriate language or unkindness are followed up by staff quickly and appropriately.

Pupils develop a keen sense of local and global citizenship. They understand how their contributions to society can have a positive impact on others. For example, they enjoy singing to residents in a local care home at Christmas. They are passionate about their work to improve the life chances of two children in other countries through sponsoring their education.

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

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum. They have considered how this curriculum gives pupils the knowledge they need to be successful in life. Teaching builds subject-specific knowledge around carefully chosen people or events. These ensure the curriculum celebrates diversity and challenges stereotypes. This gives pupils a deep understanding of these people, places or events. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

In most of the curriculum, knowledge and vocabulary are well sequenced from the Nursery to Year 6. In the Nursery, for example, children begin to use language to talk about the seasons. This prepares them for work on weather systems and climate change in geography when they are older. In a few subjects, the curriculum is not as well sequenced. Leaders are in the process of identifying the small steps of knowledge pupils need in these subjects.

Reading is at the heart of the curriculum. Children in Nursery and Reception enjoy listening to and joining in with sounds, rhymes and familiar stories. This sets them up well for when they start phonics. Pupils quickly acquire the knowledge they need to segment words and blend sounds to become fluent readers. Leaders have structured the reading curriculum for older pupils around progressively more complex texts. This develops pupils' ability to read and understand a wide range of genres, content and vocabulary.

Teaching is based on effective use of assessment across the curriculum. Learning is adapted to take account of what pupils already know. Following the disruption caused by the pandemic, leaders identified gaps in pupils' mathematical knowledge. Consequently, they have focused on developing pupils' ability to recall number facts fluently so that they are more able to use these in problem-solving or reasoning. Pupils recall knowledge well and enjoy the challenge their mathematics lessons give them.

Teachers have worked together to decide the strategies that best meet the needs of their pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils with SEND have barriers to their learning accurately identified. Learning is adapted in a range of ways and, as a result, meets the needs of all pupils well.

Pupils have a good understanding of discrimination. They know some of the protected characteristics and why people might experience discrimination. They learn about different world faiths and cultures. They respect people who have different beliefs or opinions to their own.

Staff at the school are ambitious for pupils and themselves. Staff are eager to keep learning, and have good subject knowledge of the subjects they teach. Leaders have used research to inspire the content and delivery of teaching. Staff are very positive about the support they receive from senior leaders, governors and the trust. Trust-wide systems and collaboration have a positive impact on staff's well-being and workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained. They know the signs of abuse. Staff record and report any concerns in an appropriate and timely way. This enables leaders to act swiftly where necessary. Leaders are tenacious when following up concerns with other agencies. This secures effective support for pupils and families when they need it.

Pupils feel safe. They are confident to tell adults if they have a worry. They learn about how to keep themselves safe. They understand that a secret may need to be shared with a responsible adult if they are worried about someone.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few places, the implementation of the curriculum is too variable. As a result, pupils do not learn as well. Leaders need to ensure that the curriculum is implemented securely and consistently across the school, so that pupils learn more and remember 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 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Mary the Virgin CofE VA Primary School, to be good in October 2017.

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	147145
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10268536
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	234
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Nigel Rees
Headteacher	Sarah Willoughby
Website	www.stmarygillingham.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school joined the Sherbourne Area Schools' Trust in May 2019.
- The headteacher is a member of the leadership team of the trust.
- The most recent section 48 inspection took place in June 2019.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

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 her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. 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 held meetings with the headteacher, head of school, special educational needs coordinator, curriculum leaders and teaching and support staff.

- The inspector met with members of the governing body including the chair of governors and with representatives from the trust, including the chief executive officer.
- The inspector met with the designated safeguarding leads to discuss how they keep pupils safe in school. She considered the school's recruitment procedures, staff induction and training, records of concerns and their engagement with external agencies. The inspector also spoke with staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- The inspector listened to pupils read to an adult.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. In addition, she met with pupils informally and formally to hear their views.
- The inspector considered responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. She also took into consideration responses to the staff and pupil surveys.
- The inspector examined a range of documentation provided by the school, including documentation relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Angela Folland, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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