

Inspection of a good school: Mepal and Witcham Church of England Primary School

Brangehill Lane, Mepal, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB6 2AL

Inspection date:

2 March 2023

Outcome

Mepal and Witcham Church of England Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school is set in a rural location in one of the two villages it serves. It is a friendly and welcoming school, with plenty of space for pupils to learn, both in their classrooms and outdoors. The school's small size means that everyone knows everyone. Pupils enjoy coming to school and having fun with their friends. Some pupils travel long distances to attend the school.

Leaders want the best for pupils. They are determined that all pupils should be able to read well, and know about a wide range of things, by the time they leave the school. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on this, pupils generally achieve well at Mepal and Witcham. Pupils say that their teachers help them when they get stuck.

Leaders also have high expectations about behaviour. Pupils respond well to these expectations. They are polite and respectful. They listen carefully to their teachers and follow the school's rules. Pupils feel safe at school. They say that bullying is rare. They are confident that staff will always sort out problems if they do arise. Pupils say that the staff will always listen if they are worried about anything.

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

Leaders have focused well on developing the school's curriculum since the previous inspection. They have ensured that the curriculum is broad, well balanced and interesting. Leaders describe the curriculum as 'knowledge rich.' Their intention is that all pupils should leave the school with a broad range of knowledge and understanding of the world around them. They have gone a long way to achieving this. However, some subjects, such as English, mathematics and art, are further developed than others, such as music and geography. Pupils generally achieve well across the curriculum, although less highly in subjects that are less well developed.

Leaders are strongly committed to ensuring that all pupils learn to read confidently during their time at the school. They also focus well on encouraging pupils to develop a love of reading. Books and reading are a key part of each school day. Staff read aloud so that pupils have the pleasure of listening to a story. They also read aloud so that pupils are exposed to 'intentionally ambitious' texts during English lessons.

Leaders have ensured that a suitable systematic synthetic phonics programme is in place. Staff have the subject knowledge they need to deliver the programme well. Some phonics teaching is highly effective, including in early years. Where this is the case, staff think very carefully about how best to present new information and how to give pupils opportunities to practise their learning. Staff pick up and address pupils' misconceptions and errors very quickly. As a result, pupils make rapid progress and quickly begin to read and write.

In some year groups, although not weak, the phonics programme is delivered less effectively. This means that teaching is less well matched to pupils' knowledge and understanding, and where this happens, pupils' progress is slower.

Teachers check pupils' learning carefully. At the beginning of each lesson, they check how well pupils remember what they were taught previously. This helps pupils to remember more in the longer term. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and others who fall behind from time to time, are given the additional help they need to catch up. Teachers carefully identify the gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. They make sure that extra support is carefully planned to fill those gaps. This helps pupils with SEND to achieve well.

The school has a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Pupils enjoy their learning and listen carefully to their teachers. They try hard and do their best. This helps them to achieve well.

A key feature of the school is its carefully chosen and designed '100 things to do while you are at Mepal and Witcham' programme. The list includes activities such as visiting a museum, lighting a campfire and going to the theatre. It provides pupils with a range of opportunities that they might not otherwise have. This is further supplemented by other trips and visits linked to the curriculum, as well as visitors to the school. The personal, social and health education curriculum is well structured and provides pupils with knowledge and understanding of a broad range of issues.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school has a strong safeguarding culture. It is a small school where each pupil is known well. Pupils say there is always someone they can talk to if they are worried about anything.

Staff are well trained to spot possible signs of abuse and neglect. They are vigilant and report their concerns promptly. The school's designated safeguarding leads understand

their role well. They take prompt and appropriate action, when necessary, to protect pupils.

Recruitment practices are robust. All the required pre-appointment checks are carried out diligently. The school's single central record of those checks meets requirements.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Phonics is further developed, and more closely matched to pupils' needs, in some year groups than in others. This means that a small number of pupils do not learn phonics as well or as quickly as they could. Leaders should take action to ensure that the phonics teaching is closely matched to pupils' needs in all year groups it is taught.
- The curriculum is less developed in some subjects, such as music and geography, than it is in others. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well in these subjects. Leaders should continue their work on developing the curriculum, as well as consolidating the work already done so that pupils achieve highly across the full range of subjects.

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 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	141212
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10268433
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	110
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mike Younger
Headteacher	Louise Lomax
Website	www.mepalwitcham.cambs.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 October 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has a religious character. It is a Church of England school, sponsored by the Diocese of Ely Multi-Academy Trust.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has extended its age range. Children are now admitted to the early years class from the age of two years.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection 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 met with the headteacher, the assistant headteacher, a group of staff, the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, a representative of the local governing body and two school performance directors from the multi-academy trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and art. For each deep dive, inspectors 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.

- Inspectors also listened to pupils reading, scrutinised a range of school documents and observed pupils during playtime.
- In order to check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of pre-appointment checks, looked at records of child protection concerns and spoke with parents, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors took account of 23 responses to Ofsted Parent View and 22 free-text comments. They also took account of eight responses to the staff survey and 25 to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sam Nixon

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 2023