

Inspection of Sissinghurst Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Common Road, Sissinghurst, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2BH

Inspection dates: 28 February and 1 March 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They describe how their learning is fun. They enjoy experiences such as trips, visitors and interactive days. Pupils learn well in phonics and mathematics. However, expectations of them in other subjects are not consistently well matched to what they already know and can do. As a result, pupils do not build knowledge well enough as they move through the school.

The school has a caring environment where pupils feel heard and valued. Pupils value kindness and can describe what it means to be a good friend. They strive to demonstrate this around school. As a result, they get on well together. Pupils enjoy their social times, such as playtime in the extensive grounds.

Pupils are expected to behave well, and they do. The school is an orderly environment. Pupils know that bullying is not tolerated here. Pupils benefit from positive and supportive relationships with staff, who pupils say are kind and helpful. They know that staff are quick to sort out any concerns for them. This helps them to feel safe.

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

The school has been through an unsettled period and experienced many changes to leadership. This, as well as the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, has impacted on leaders' work to develop the curriculum and improve key aspects such as pupils' attendance. Governors are committed to the school and are clear about the school's vision and aims. They have been hampered by the leadership changes and difficulties in organising meetings. However, governance oversight of some aspects of the school has not been sufficiently robust.

Leaders have placed a high priority on ensuring that pupils learn to read fluently. The new phonics programme has been carefully structured. Children begin daily phonics sessions in Reception. Staff throughout the school are well trained in phonics and deliver this programme consistently well. Children in early years, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), benefit from a focus on developing language. Often, this is linked to books. For example, children in early years chatted about the story of 'The Three Little Pigs' as they played at building a brick wall to keep out the 'big bad wolf'.

Staff keep a close check on how well pupils know and remember the sounds they have learned. They provide effective extra support for pupils who fall behind in reading. Beyond phonics, the reading curriculum is not yet fully sequenced. It does not set out what pupils should achieve by the end of each year. The knowledge and skills older pupils need to make improvements to their reading are not planned carefully enough. Pupils do not develop a breadth of reading skills as they move

through key stage 2 to help them to deepen their understanding across the curriculum.

The curriculum in mathematics is well thought out. Children in early years get off to a good start in mathematics and build on this secure start as they move through the school. However, this is not the case in many of the foundation subjects. In these subjects, leaders have not been precise enough about the knowledge they want pupils to know and remember. This means that teachers are not clear on what they should teach and when. As a result, pupils are not achieving well enough.

Across the curriculum, staff make sure that pupils with SEND are supported well. Leaders have appropriate systems to enable pupils' needs to be identified. Pupils with SEND are therefore provided with the support and adaptations they need to be successful. This is particularly the case in mathematics, where learning is appropriately broken down into clear steps. Pupils with SEND are fully included in the life of the school.

Pupils learn about how to stay healthy and are aware of the importance of both mental and physical health. Leaders aspire for pupils to be prepared well for life in modern Britain. However, pupils' understanding of important values such as tolerance and respect is not yet as secure. This is because these aspects of the curriculum are not always fully delivered, despite detailed plans set out by leaders.

Leaders' approach to monitoring attendance lacks rigour. The high rates of persistent absence are not reducing quickly enough, which means that, too often, pupils miss out on important learning.

Relationships across the school are supportive. Parents particularly appreciate the nurturing 'family feel' of the school. The staff team is strong, and they recognise the hard work of those who have taken on additional responsibility during the leadership changes.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that staff have the training they need to identify safeguarding concerns. This is updated regularly. Everyone knows that safeguarding is a top priority and what to do if they feel a pupil is at risk. Leaders ensure that accurate records reflect the actions they take to address concerns swiftly. They are tenacious when seeking further support from professional agencies when pupils and families really need it. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Beyond phonics, the reading curriculum is not fully sequenced. Pupils are not developing their reading well enough as they move through the school. Leaders should improve the reading curriculum so that it is ambitious and the order in which knowledge is taught to pupils builds effectively over time.
- In most foundation subjects, leaders have not ensured that the planned curriculum is implemented in well-sequenced steps. Some content is decided by individual teachers, and this weakens the impact of leaders' intended curriculum. Leaders need to ensure that they refine their curriculum and provide greater guidance for staff about the most important knowledge pupils need to learn and remember.
- Governors' strategic oversight of some aspects of the school's work is not sufficiently robust. As a result, governors do not have a strong enough understanding of aspects of the school's work. Governors need to put in place stronger systems to enable them to have a clearer understanding of the school's work so that they can fulfil their strategic responsibilities more effectively.
- Leaders monitor attendance, but their systems lack the necessary rigour and focus on improving rates of persistent absence for some pupils. The more time pupils are away from school, the greater the gaps in their knowledge of the curriculum. Leaders should review their systems for monitoring and responding to attendance concerns, ensuring there is a systematic approach to resolving attendance issues and making sure pupils catch up on missed learning.

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	118717
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10268973
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	171
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Bonno De Haan
Acting Headteacher	Sharmila Desai
Website	www.sissinghurst.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act

Information about this school

- The school has been through several changes in leadership since the previous inspection. A new headteacher has been appointed to lead the school from April 2023. Currently, the school is led by an acting headteacher and an acting deputy headteacher.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school 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.

- During the inspection, the lead inspector met regularly with school leaders. She also met with representatives from the governing body and had telephone conversations with representatives from the local authority and the Diocese of Canterbury.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, music and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector listened to pupils read to an adult from the school.
- Safeguarding records were reviewed, including the single central record and appointment procedures. The inspectors spoke to staff about safeguarding and spoke to pupils about the support they have in understanding how to keep safe.
- Inspectors reviewed the responses to Ofsted's parent, pupil and staff surveys. An inspector spoke to some parents at the school gate.
- The inspectors talked to staff to gather their views about the school, including about their workload and well-being. The inspectors met with several groups of pupils, as well as speaking to pupils during lessons, lunchtime and during a tour of the school.

Inspection team

Deborah Gordon, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Toby Martlew

Ofsted Inspector

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