

Inspection of a good school: St Stephen's Junior School

Hales Drive, St Stephens, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7AD

Inspection dates:

28 February and 1 March 2023

Outcome

St Stephen's Junior School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders and staff know every pupil in this large, inclusive school. Relationships between adults and pupils are a strength. Pupils' well-being is a priority for everyone. The newly introduced 'zones of regulation' are appreciated by pupils to help them identify and manage their emotions. Pupils say that their teachers are kind and always help them to learn. Pupils are happy, respectful and enjoy learning. They develop a real sense of belonging, which is at the heart of the school's values. A group of pupils accurately summed up their school as being 'A child-friendly school where everyone is welcome and where everyone belongs.'

Pupils feel safe because they know that adults have time for them and listen to their concerns. Pupils know there is always someone to speak to if they are upset or unhappy about anything. Any bullying is dealt with swiftly and fairly. Pupils know that teachers have high expectations of them and rise to the challenge. Pupils work hard and pay attention in lessons. The vast majority of pupils behave well. Pupils who struggle to regulate their behaviour receive the support they need. Pupils know and understand the school rules, 'ready, respectful, safe'.

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

The co-headteachers work together extremely effectively. Their inspiring leadership promotes a positive culture. They have carefully and accurately identified the school's strengths and areas that need further work. Leadership capacity has been strengthened, including through the appointment of an additional special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). This is to meet the needs of an increasing number of pupils with high levels of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers have good knowledge of

the subjects they teach because they are supported and advised well by skilled and experienced subject leaders.

The curriculum is ambitious for all pupils, including those with SEND. Leaders are continuing to refine the curriculum to ensure that it even more precisely meets the needs of all pupils. This work is further developing in some subjects. Teachers check on pupils' learning in a range of ways and use the information to plan subsequent learning. Pupils achieve well overall. This includes pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged. Staff identify these pupils' individual needs accurately. Teachers and teaching assistants know what to do to support them effectively so that they achieve as well as they can.

Most pupils become confident and fluent readers. The reading curriculum is appropriately structured and consistently taught. Pupils are exposed to a good range of good-quality texts that make increasing demands and challenges on the reader. A love of reading is promoted extensively throughout the school. Pupils are enthusiastic to increase the amount of reading they do through an online reading programme. Some pupils are still at an early stage of reading. Leaders have rightly put in place a phonics programme to support them. However, there is not always enough urgency for pupils to catch up quickly enough and acquire the skills they need to keep up in the future.

Most pupils are well behaved, caring and kind and have good attitudes to learning. However, a few pupils are occasionally a bit unsettled by a small minority of pupils who sometimes struggle to manage their own behaviour. Some parents are concerned about bullying and behaviour. The inspector found that staff and leaders are providing appropriate support and guidance to help these pupils. Leaders are working diligently to make sure that no behaviour or bullying incidents go unchecked or disrupt the learning of others.

Pupils are proud of their leadership roles in school, acting as eco-councillors and playtime leaders, for instance. They are enthusiastic about their work to support the local community. Pupils enjoy a range of clubs and trips. Pupils are curious and want to learn new things. Most parents are happy with the school. Staff are very positive about working at the school. They feel valued and know that leaders are mindful of their workload and their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding and well-being are priorities for everyone. Staff are fully trained in safeguarding matters and understand their responsibilities. They know pupils well and quickly identify any signs that a child may be at risk of harm. Staff know what to do if they have a concern. Any necessary action is taken quickly, including from specialist services where appropriate. Record-keeping is thorough. Leaders ensure that there are rigorous processes for dealing with any accidents or medical needs in school. The required checks are made on adults who work in the school. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' work to review all the curriculum subjects is not yet complete. In a few subjects, there is not the same degree of precision in what pupils need to learn and when as there is in others. Therefore, pupils are not building on or remembering key concepts as well as they might. Leaders need to complete their planned work in all the curriculum subjects to ensure that they make more explicit the important knowledge they want pupils to learn.
- Some pupils who are still at an early stage of learning to read are not catching up quickly enough. This is because the support they receive is not always fully effective. Leaders should ensure that the phonics programme is delivered with sufficient pace and urgency to ensure that pupils catch up quickly and develop the ability to keep up and become fluent, competent readers.
- Some pupils remain concerned about the behaviour of a small minority of pupils. Leaders need to ensure that all staff continue to consistently and relentlessly promote positive behaviour strategies in order to reassure those pupils and parents who have concerns.

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 November 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	136393
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10256475
Type of school	Junior
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	415
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Andrew Connell
Headteacher	Laura Cutts (co-headteacher) Sarah Heaney (co-headteacher)
Website	www.ststephensjuniorschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, the leadership of the school has changed. The co-headteachers have been in post since September 2020. Leadership at other levels has been restructured, including the appointment of three assistant headteachers.
- The school does not currently use any 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 her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteachers, the assistant headteachers, the SENCos, other leaders and staff.
- The inspector met with trustees, including the chair. She also held a telephone conversation with the school improvement adviser.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, talked to some pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector also looked at curriculum information in other subjects and observed some pupils reading to a teaching assistant.
- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector spoke with leaders, staff and pupils. She looked at the single central record of recruitment checks and safeguarding records. Throughout the inspection, the inspector considered and checked the culture of safeguarding within the school.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documentation, including the school development plan and the school's own evaluation of its effectiveness.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. She talked to pupils about their learning and behaviour in school. The inspector also asked pupils about safeguarding and whether they feel safe in school.
- The inspector considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff, pupils and parents. She also spoke to some parents at the beginning of the school day and considered the school's recent parent survey.

Inspection team

Margaret Coussins, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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