

Inspection of a good school: St Mary's Church of England Academy

Trinity Avenue, Mildenhall, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP28 7LR

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 March 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils enjoy coming to school and are happy. They understand that their teachers are ambitious for them and want them to do well. They try hard and respond well to these aspirations. However, pupils get frustrated when learning aims are unclear or tasks do not seem to help them learn.

Most pupils behave well. They are respectful and polite. Some pupils do not always follow the high expectations that leaders have for their behaviour. This leads to disruption to learning, which is not always swiftly dealt with by teachers. Some pupils display boisterous behaviour during social times. This worries some pupils, particularly the younger ones. Not all pupils have been taught clearly about what bullying is. When there are genuine cases of bullying, they are quickly dealt with.

Pupils and parents can access a range of support and specialists through the school, such as the school's 'Thrive' practitioner. Pupils can get support to help them process and manage emotional issues. They learn strategies that help them interact and communicate with others.

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

Leaders have identified the important knowledge that pupils should learn in each subject. They have broken this knowledge down into smaller chunks and ordered it, to build towards understanding more complex ideas. Leaders have identified what pupils should know by set times of the year. However, teachers do not help pupils build effectively on what they already know and can do. Teachers do not always identify when pupils are not secure in their understanding. Teachers sometimes do not explain content clearly. Some teachers are new to the school. Leaders have not ensured that all new teachers

understand the curriculum and what pupils should know. As result of these weaknesses, pupils sometimes struggle to understand what they are taught.

Leaders have prioritised reading. They have introduced a new phonics programme. Staff who have received training in this programme are more confident and teach phonics consistently. Books are well matched to pupils' phonics knowledge. This enables pupils to practise reading the sounds they are learning. Teachers spot pupils who are not keeping up with phonics. Leaders provide extra support for these pupils. Children in the early years are becoming fluent and confident readers. However, some pupils in key stage 1 have not yet secured basic phonics knowledge they need to read fluently. Leaders have extended the phonics programme across all year groups to address this.

Recently appointed subject leaders try to support teachers to develop their subject-specific knowledge. However, senior leaders have not made time available for subject leaders to check on the effectiveness of teaching or to provide the support that teachers need. This means that teaching is not as precise as it needs to be.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) experience the same issues with the teaching of the curriculum as other pupils. Leaders use a range of different strategies to identify and support pupils with SEND. However, many of these duplicate and dilute the impact of each other. Leaders have not ensured that teachers can adapt teaching to support pupils with SEND effectively. Pupils with SEND sometimes miss learning critical knowledge and struggle to make the progress that they are capable of.

Children in the early years are confident and happy. Clear routines ensure that children understand how to interact with each other. Children are polite and considerate of each other. Adults ensure that children's play is purposeful and linked to current learning aims. Staff effectively develop children's independence. Children are well prepared for learning in key stage 1.

When pupils misbehave, it is not always dealt with by adults. Expectations for behaviour are not consistent. Pupils sometimes become distracted in lessons and disturb others' learning. The behaviour of some pupils on the playground is silly and boisterous. This worries some pupils.

Leaders have identified opportunities for pupils to learn about different cultures. However, what leaders want pupils to learn is broad, imprecise and not embedded into curriculum delivery. This means that pupils miss out on opportunities to understand and celebrate diversity. Leaders provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities that many pupils enjoy and take advantage of.

Many staff feel their workload is not well managed. Leaders often introduce additional initiatives that overlap or conflict with strategies that are already in place. This adds to staff workload. Staff understand that the leaders' and governors' plans to reduce their workload will take time to take effect.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that all staff have regular safeguarding training. This helps staff remain alert to potential risks and signs of harm. Staff are quick to identify and report concerns. Leaders take timely action to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to provide necessary support to vulnerable pupils and their families. Governors are diligent in their checks of leaders' and staff's work to keep pupils safe.

Pupils learn how to stay safe. They can describe how to protect themselves when they are online. Pupils know who they can talk to if they have any worries.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teaching is not as precise as it needs to be. Explanations, teachers' modelling of work and assessment do not consistently work as well as they should. As a result, pupils do not make the progress that they should. Leaders should ensure that teachers know what to teach, how to teach it and how to check pupils' understanding effectively to enable all pupils to progress well.
- The role of subject leader is relatively new to the school. Subject leaders have not been given the time to monitor how effectively the curriculum is taught or support staff with the teaching of the curriculum. Senior leaders should ensure that subject leaders have the time required to enable them to check on the effectiveness of teaching in their subjects and to support teachers to increase the consistency and precision of teaching.
- Leaders have not ensured that clear and consistent routines and expectations about behaviour are in place. Adults are inconsistent in their responses to misbehaviour in classrooms and around the school. This means there are occasions where learning is disrupted and when unsettling behaviour at social times is not effectively challenged and dealt with. Leaders should ensure all staff apply a consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour so that pupils are clear about, and follow, leaders' expectations.

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 June 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	137419
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10255190
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	418
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael J Crawshaw OBE
Executive Principal	Lynne Stabler
Website	www.smpsac.org
Date of previous inspection	8 to 9 June 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The executive principal joined the school in 2018.
- The school has a religious character, Church of England, and was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 on 11 March 2020. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider and one unregistered alternative provider.

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 their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with leaders, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher, early years leader, special educational needs coordinator, representatives from the governing body and a representative from the local authority's school support team.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- To further evaluate the quality of education, the inspector reviewed curriculum documentation for history, geography, religious education and 'wellbeing', scrutinised pupils' workbooks from across the curriculum and reviewed documentation setting out support for pupils with SEND.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead to review safeguarding records and the office manager to scrutinise the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. The inspector also spoke to governors, staff, pupils and parents, and reviewed surveys to evaluate the culture of safeguarding.
- To gather pupils' views, the inspector spent time observing and speaking to pupils. The inspector reviewed the 115 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- The inspector reviewed the 44 responses and 34 free-text responses submitted to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View.
- To gather staff's views, the inspector spoke to several members of staff and reviewed the 31 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Dave Gibson, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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