

Inspection of a good school: Watton-at-Stone Primary and Nursery School

Rectory Lane, Watton-At-Stone, Hertford, Hertfordshire SG14 3SG

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 March 2023

Outcome

Watton-at-Stone Primary and Nursery School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Children and pupils are happy here. Staff keep them safe. Pupils value the strong working relationships with adults that underpin their work in classrooms. Expectations for learning and behaviour are high, including for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The youngest children in the pre-school and early years learn quickly in a language-rich environment. Leaders want pupils to experience a strong curriculum that is rich in subject knowledge. In some areas, pupils make very strong progress in building this knowledge. Leaders and teachers work hard as they aim to make learning in all subjects equally strong.

Most pupils behave well. They understand differences between different types of bullying and know how to recognise if it is taking place. Although rare, they are confident that staff would take swift action to stop it. Routes for reporting concerns are clear, including through 'worry boxes' in classrooms.

A wide range of clubs and activities is on offer, including choir, sports, science and Spanish. Older pupils enjoy residential trips. They value the opportunities given to assume responsibility, such as being sports leaders and play leaders.

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

In the last three years, leaders have made changes to the school's curriculum. All subjects have clear, theoretical statements showing how pupils should build subject-specific knowledge as they move from pre-school through to Year 6. In subjects such as mathematics, history and geography, these are dovetailed precisely with schemes of work. These show thoughtful consideration about how pupils develop understanding of broader subject-specific concepts. In turn, this helps secure pupils' increasingly deep understanding of ideas such as measurement, monarchy and hierarchy, and mapping.

Pupils take pride in their work. They carry exercise books forward from one year to the next, showing very well how pupils learn to improve and connect their knowledge.

In a few other curriculum subjects, activities are planned but these are not always connected or assessed in a way that builds and checks pupils' knowledge. Schemes of work are not as precisely aligned with the school's theoretical knowledge progression statements. The emphasis is on pupils completing or participating in tasks rather than on the quality of their work. Consequently, pupils' knowledge and understanding in these subjects is less secure.

Pupils with SEND are supported well in the classroom. Clear strategies help teachers adapt activities to enable the participation of individuals alongside their peers. Those needing time out for behavioural or emotional reasons are helped in a way that ensures minimum loss of learning.

Leaders give high priority to developing reading skills. Children's language development and vocabulary are prioritised the moment they join pre-school. Staff receive regular phonics training. Most reading books match the sounds and letters that pupils know, although on occasion these are not precisely matched against the phonics learning phases. Phonics is taught from Nursery and, by the time they start Year 2, most pupils are fluent readers. The few who continue to struggle are given personalised help to catch up from the most experienced staff. Classrooms are very well resourced with fiction and non-fiction texts. These inspire pupils to develop a love of books.

Pupils conduct themselves well when moving around the school, when speaking with adults, and in formal situations such as assemblies. In class, their behaviour is generally very positive, although some older pupils occasionally need reminding to keep on task.

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is woven throughout the curriculum, including in geography and history. The school's personal, social and health education programme is well established. It gives pupils a sensible, age-appropriate understanding of issues such as respect and consent. It also includes comprehensive online safety guidance. Leaders have identified that older pupils have increasing access to mobile devices and applications. They have rightly communicated with parents to remind them about their responsibilities, and approaches they can take, to help keep their children safe online.

Staff are unanimously supportive of leaders' consideration for their workload and well-being. Subject leaders have the time they need to develop and monitor their curriculum areas.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All necessary recruitment checks on staff are undertaken and recorded accurately. Safeguarding case files are kept precisely and are well ordered. These show that prompt action is taken when concerns or allegations are raised. Prompt referrals are made to

external agencies when required and are followed up in a timely manner. Discreet support is given to pupils and families when it is needed.

Staff receive regular training, which is effective. Staff show accurate and detailed knowledge about all aspects of safeguarding. Pupils are well briefed about safeguarding matters and know who to talk to if they have concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- While provision for phonics is broadly effective overall, a few inconsistencies are evident, for example in the occasional use of books not matched to phonics learning phases. Consequently, pupils do not consistently get the practice they need to develop their skills. Leaders should review the school's strategic approach, not just to ensure that it consistently meets all the criteria for an effective phonics programme but also to ensure that it makes the most efficient use of leaders' time.
- In a few foundation subjects, schemes of work do not precisely reflect the progression as set out in the school's theoretical knowledge progression statements. Consequently, pupils' participation in, and completion of, tasks is assessed, rather than their developing knowledge or the quality of their responses. Their knowledge and understanding in these subjects is less secure. Leaders should complete their work to overhaul the curriculum by ensuring that schemes of work in all subjects, and all assessments of pupils' work, are closely aligned with the school's knowledge progression statements.

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 July 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	117171
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10255212
Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	231
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Co-chairs of governors	Liz Aston and Jess Bentley
Headteacher	Nikki Etienne
Website	www.wattonatstone.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 July 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

The headteacher was appointed in September 2019.

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 school leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and other senior staff. The inspector also met with three governors and held an online meeting with representatives from the local authority.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. The deep dives included meeting with subject leaders and teachers, visiting lessons, talking with pupils and looking at their work in books. The inspector sampled curriculum plans, met with teachers, and looked at pupils' work in other subjects, including French, design and technology, geography, art, music, computing and physical education.

- The inspector gathered evidence around the effectiveness of safeguarding, including through scrutinising records and case studies, meeting with designated safeguarding leads, talking with staff and meeting with a pupil panel.
- In addition to meeting with pupils, and with groups of teachers and teaching assistants, the inspector considered the 109 responses to Ofsted’s confidential online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Mark Phillips, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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