

Inspection of a good school: Whitehill Junior School

Whitehill Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 9HT

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 March 2023

Outcome

Whitehill Junior School continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive in this happy, vibrant and purposeful school. Pupils follow a curriculum that prepares them well for their future. They are enthusiastic learners and enjoy interesting lessons that are carefully planned by their teachers. Pupils delight in taking part in imaginative activities such as 'Space Night' and the on-site 'Big Dig'.

Across the school, pupils have a range of opportunities to develop their interests and talents. Everyone can learn a musical instrument, such as flute or clarinet. Many take part in sports teams, clubs and other activities, such as photography or coding. Pupils take great pride in representing their school in competitions.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are exemplary. They work hard in lessons. They listen carefully and respect the views of others. Pupils like the different reward systems, such as the achievers' assemblies.

Pupils are safe. They look out for one another and treat others with respect and kindness. Bullying rarely happens. Pupils are confident that, if it does, staff will deal with it effectively.

Pupils can take on responsibilities that make a real difference. For example, 'Wellbeing Warriors' help leaders look after pupils' mental health, and trained Year 5 mediators resolve friendship issues. These help pupils become active and responsible citizens.

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

Leaders have designed an aspirational curriculum to support their aim of 'profound individual growth'. The curriculum sets out the important knowledge they want pupils to know and remember. Carefully designed links between subjects, such as between geography and history, help pupils make connections in their learning.

Teachers deliver the curriculum well. They use their strong expertise to introduce new concepts clearly. Leaders ensure that all staff receive training to help them support pupils effectively. Teachers check pupils' understanding in lessons by using well-considered strategies. For example, in mathematics, pupils review previous learning at the start of every lesson. As a result, pupils develop detailed knowledge across most subjects. This is shown in the high-quality work that pupils produce.

Leaders have ensured that assessment is used well in English and mathematics. They are now developing similar systems in other subjects. Strong collaboration with the feeder infant school supports pupils as they move from Year 2 to Year 3. Information about how well pupils achieve in reading and mathematics is shared effectively. In a few other subjects, teachers do not know as much about pupils' starting points and previous learning experiences. Teachers are adapting their use of assessment to address this quickly.

Leaders prioritise the teaching of reading. Carefully planned activities help pupils develop their vocabulary and comprehension skills. As a result, pupils are confident and enthusiastic readers. Leaders quickly identify pupils who need extra help with reading. They provide extra support to help them improve. Regular checks ensure that pupils read books at the right level. Leaders are providing further phonics training for staff so they can support weaker readers even more consistently.

The individual needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are accurately identified. Teachers and other adults provide effective individual and group support. They are skilled at adapting activities for these pupils. Consequently, most pupils with SEND access the same learning as their peers. Pupils with SEND achieve well.

Pupils show high levels of maturity, self-control and cooperation. They contribute enthusiastically to lessons and take pride in their work. Pupils across the school have high expectations of themselves and of others. Adults, including a counsellor, provide effective support for pupils' social and emotional needs. The school is a calm and purposeful place in which to learn.

The provision for personal development is of a high quality. Leaders provide an impressive range of opportunities to help pupils develop their understanding of the world. Pupils regularly take part in music and sporting activities. They relish the range of other clubs and activities willingly provided by staff. Pupils are self-motivated and universally confident, polite and respectful.

Leaders enjoy the overwhelming support of pupils, staff and parents. Staff are proud to be part of 'Team Whitehill'. They appreciate leaders' support for their well-being.

Governors are committed to ensuring that pupils receive the best possible education. They support and challenge leaders effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff receive regular training to keep their safeguarding knowledge up to date. They are vigilant and report any concerns promptly. Leaders take swift and effective action when issues are raised. They are tenacious in securing help for pupils and their families. Leaders keep detailed safeguarding records. They link these with other information to inform the strong pastoral support provided.

Pupils learn how to stay safe, both at home and online. They know they can talk to adults if they have any worries.

Appropriate safer recruitment and employment checks are made and recorded accurately. Governors check safeguarding arrangements thoroughly.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers' use of assessment in a small number of foundation subjects is not as well established as in other subjects. This means that teachers' ability to adapt teaching in response to pupils' needs in these subjects is not yet as highly effective as in other areas of the curriculum. Leaders should continue to support teachers so that assessment is used to adapt the curriculum in these subjects further to build effectively on what pupils have learned previously.

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	117253
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10255193
Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	241
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Wendie Ray
Headteacher	Steve Mills
Website	www.whitehill.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 and 15 June 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Leaders do not use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspector carried out this ungraded inspection under Section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 the headteacher and the assistant headteachers, one of whom is also the special educational needs coordinator.
- The inspector met with three members of the governing body and held a telephone discussion with the chair of governors. A further telephone discussion was held with the school improvement adviser from the local authority.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum documentation, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work.
- To evaluate safeguarding, the inspector checked the school's single central record, considered the safeguarding policy, and spoke to staff and pupils. The inspector also discussed safeguarding records with the designated safeguarding leaders.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised during the inspection, including curriculum plans, school development plans and safeguarding and behaviour records.
- The inspector spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences of school life to understand what it is like to be a pupil in this school.
- The inspector considered the views of parents, including 109 responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and 90 free-text comments submitted during the inspection. The inspector also took account of the 22 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and the 159 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.

Inspection team

John Constable, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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