

Inspection of a good school: St John's CofE Primary School

Hertford Road, Digswell, Welwyn, Hertfordshire AL6 0BX

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 April 2023

Outcome

St John's CofE Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending St John's. Pupils want to achieve the best they can, and support each other to do this. They aim to reach the high expectations staff have for them. They achieve well. Pupils enjoy celebrating each other's successes at regular events and see the importance of these.

Pupils behave well throughout the school. In lessons, pupils are attentive and respectful. They listen to adults and participate enthusiastically in learning activities. Older pupils mentor younger pupils. They help to welcome them to the school and involve them in activities during social times. Bullying rarely happens. If it does happen, pupils are confident that staff will deal with it promptly. Pupils know if they are worried about something, they have trusted adults in the school they can discuss this with. Pupils feel safe at school.

There are rich and varied opportunities that pupils take part in outside of lessons. These enhance what pupils learn about in the curriculum. For example, pupils have hatched a family of ducks and take responsibility in caring for them, this helps them learn more about animals and how they develop.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum that aims to build pupils' knowledge over time. They have identified the important knowledge they want pupils to learn in each subject from early years to Year 6. This is organised in an order that builds on what pupils have learned previously, year on year.

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn the same broad curriculum as their peers. Where changes are needed for pupils with SEND, teachers adapt their teaching in a precise and skilled way. As a result, pupils with SEND receive the support they need and achieve well.

Leaders have made reading a focus for all pupils at the school. Leaders have carefully chosen the stories that teachers read to pupils. This starts in Nursery. These stories promote pupils' wider development by introducing them to different cultures and themes. Leaders identify pupils who find reading difficult. These pupils receive specific support to help them improve and catch up. Leaders have recently introduced a new phonics scheme across the school. While teachers have good subject knowledge to teach reading, some teachers are still developing teaching strategies to ensure all pupils recognise groups of letters and the sounds they make. This can impact on how well a small number of pupils recognise certain words and their ability to read them. These pupils make slower progress with their reading than their classmates.

Teachers plan activities that help pupils to learn effectively. They focus on the important knowledge that they want pupils to learn. Teachers break down and introduce this knowledge in small steps. They check that pupils are secure in their understanding before moving on to more complex or different topics. Teachers use well-designed resources and clear explanations when introducing new knowledge and content. This helps pupils to know and remember more over time. Adults in the early years plan activities that capture children's interest and support children's learning across the curriculum. They are skilled at helping children

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They concentrate in lessons and listen attentively. Pupils' behaviour rarely disturbs the learning of others. Children in the early years learn to follow routines and how to play and learn with others. This helps them to be ready for learning in Year 1.

Leaders promote pupils' personal development effectively. Pupils are actively involved in the local community. For example, they plant trees in local woodland areas, collaborate with local secondary school pupils to take part in activities and regularly take part in church events. Pupils access a range of clubs that enable them to develop their interests, for example, music, sports and languages clubs. Pupils learn about democracy through the personal, social, health education curriculum and assemblies. Pupils have an opportunity to be a member of the pupil parliament. Pupils learn to celebrate diversity. They are inquisitive about each other's cultures. Pupils seek to understand and celebrate each other's differences.

Leaders, including those responsible for governance, support staff to manage their workload. Leaders have introduced a mental health first aider to prioritise staff well-being support. Staff are proud to work at the school and feel well supported by school leaders and governors.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know how to spot when a pupil may be at risk of harm. They identify and report concerns swiftly. Leaders act promptly and appropriately on concerns raised. They are tenacious in ensuring external agencies are involved where needed.

Pupils learn how to stay safe in a range of situations. They are clear on how to stay safe when online.

Leaders ensure that they complete and record all the required checks on adults new to the school thoroughly. Leaders and governors ensure that all policies and procedures follow the most recent guidance on how to keep pupils safe

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The phonics programme is newly implemented. Some teachers are still developing teaching strategies to ensure all pupils recognise groups of letters and the sounds they make. This slows their progress in becoming fluent, accurate readers. Leaders should ensure they provide clear guidance and support to all staff so that teachers consistently make effective choices in teaching all elements of leaders' chosen phonics programme.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in July 2013.

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	117460
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10268548
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	219
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Nick Johnson
Headteacher	Simon Horleston
Website	www.stjohnsdigswell.net
Date of previous inspection	8 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Pupils can attend a before- and after-school club run by an external provider.
- The religious aspects of the school's provision were last inspected in March 2018 under section 48 of the Education Act, 2005. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- 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.
- The inspector held meetings with the assistant headteachers, one of whom is responsible for inclusion, and the school's phase leaders. Inspectors also met with governor representatives, teachers, support staff and pupils.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in the following subjects: reading, mathematics, and physical education. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders,

visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils about learning and looked at a sample of pupils' work.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector scrutinised safeguarding policies, the school's record of background checks of adults at the school, and a sample of child protection files. Inspectors also spoke with governors, the designated safeguarding lead and staff about safeguarding practices at the school.
- The inspector considered the 70 responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, including 46 free-text responses. The inspector also considered the 15 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and 33 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Chris Stainsby, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023