

Inspection of a good school: St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Castle Street, Saffron Walden, Essex CB10 1BQ

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 May 2023

Outcome

St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending this small school. They learn and play together in a safe and supportive environment. The school's values of respect and compassion are demonstrated by all. This is a school where all are valued and differences are well respected. Pupils and parents/carers appreciate the teaching, support and high standards that exist at the school. There is a strong feeling of teamwork from leaders, teachers, support staff and governors, which supports pupils well.

Behaviour routines and expectations are well established and clear. Pupils behave well in lessons and move around the school calmly and appropriately as a result. Pupils understand what bullying is and say staff deal with it swiftly should it occur.

Pupils enjoy and appreciate the range of clubs, experiences and wider opportunities that are available to them. This includes drama, chess, athletics and multi-skills. During the inspection, the Year 6 class was attending one such experience: a residential visit to Mersea Island, which reinforces prior learning and gives pupils the opportunity to practise their life skills.

Pupil and parent surveys reveal an overwhelmingly positive response about the school. St Mary's provides a happy and supportive school environment and a broad, engaging and well-taught curriculum, which prepares pupils well for secondary school and for life in modern Britain.

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

Leaders carefully plan the curriculum. Policies and plans for each subject are detailed and clear, with specific end points identified. Subject leaders guide teachers in delivering

subjects and monitor where further improvements or adaptations are needed. Lessons are structured around detailed curriculum plans, which ensures consistency and continuity. Assessment is used effectively within lessons and at specified points in the term, such as the end of taught units. Teachers use information from these assessments to adapt teaching, support pupils and provide challenge for those who are ready. At times, teachers do not recognise when some pupils could be moved on to new learning to ensure that no time is wasted.

Leaders give reading and phonics a high priority. Daily sessions, using a recently introduced systematic phonics scheme, ensure that steady progress is made. Children in the Reception class enjoy interactive phonics sessions and demonstrate confidence in reading and tackling new words. Pupils falling behind are provided with tailored catch-up sessions from skilled support staff. High-quality books are available for pupils to choose for daily reading and to read at home. Teachers read to pupils regularly. Reading comprehension activities ensure that pupils consider and respond to what they are reading and learn about the key features of texts. Because teachers do not systematically teach letter formation, pupils' handwriting is not well developed.

During daily mathematics lessons, teachers focus on basic key skills, such as number bonds and multiplication tables. Teachers ensure that pupils apply what they know in problem-solving and practical work. This helps pupils to learn and practise mathematics skills. Teachers provide additional challenges for pupils to move on to or choose for themselves. While these are welcomed by pupils, a significant minority would benefit from a more accurate use of their individual starting points so that they can achieve more. This is true for other subjects too.

Personal development opportunities and lessons are a strength of the school. There is a huge range of clubs, opportunities, assemblies and experiences available to pupils. These broaden pupils' horizons, encourage resilience and respect for others, and foster an awareness of democracy and spirituality. Staff in Reception offer an appropriate range of carefully chosen activities and resources, inside and outside the classroom, which supports child development and independence.

Staff sensitively and thoroughly consider the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers ensure that pupils with SEND are supported effectively to allow them to participate with their peers in lessons. Teachers carefully monitor pupils to ensure that individual targets are met. Pupils with SEND are fully included in the life of the school. However, support staff working with pupils in classes would benefit from clearer guidance from leaders and teachers and feedback about the quality of their work so that the impact of their learning is maximised.

Leaders, including governors, are rigorous in their oversight of curriculum delivery, teaching and outcomes. They seek to involve parents/carers and the local community in school life and communicate well with them. Pupils are at the heart of all they do. Useful professional development is offered to all staff so that everyone is kept up to date. Leaders carefully consider staff workload. Relationships are strong. This is very much a school team.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe. The headteacher leads a well-trained, proactive and vigilant safeguarding team. The team identifies pupils at risk of harm, neglect or exploitation and refers them in a timely manner to safeguarding partners. Detailed, confidential records are kept. Staff are regularly trained and briefed.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and have a trusted adult they could confide in. They are taught about risks, including those online. Safe recruitment practices are in place, and records of vetting checks undertaken on staff, volunteers and contractors meet requirements. Governors check leaders' safeguarding policies and practices to ensure that statutory guidance is followed and practice is up to date.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not always recognise when pupils are ready for more challenging learning. This means that some pupils do not access the curriculum in as much depth as they could. Leaders should ensure that teachers routinely use their assessments to identify and build upon pupils' starting points and establish when they are ready to move on to new learning.
- Members of the support staff team working in various classrooms are often managed by different people. This can result in some ambiguity as to the aim of their work and what they need pupils to achieve. Leaders must ensure that support staff know and understand the purpose of their role and each activity through a clear and precise line of accountability, monitoring, and briefing.
- Pupils' handwriting and presentation are variable and often not of a good standard. This impedes the recording of learning, as many do not possess a fluid, cursive style. Leaders need to ensure that teachers know when and how to teach handwriting and that they do so systematically.

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 May 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	115155
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10268618
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	John Westnedge
Headteacher	Christopher Jarman
Website	www.stmaryssw.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a primary school with Reception provision.
- This is a Church of England (Voluntary Aided) primary school with links to the local church of St Mary's in Saffron Walden.
- The school makes use of registered alternative provision for one of its pupils on a part-time basis.

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 met with the headteacher, senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders, the school business manager and other staff. The inspector met with representatives from the school's governing body, including the chair of governors. The inspector also met remotely with a representative from the local authority who works with the school.

- Deep dives were undertaken in phonics and early reading, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, looked at policies and planning, visited a sample of lessons with leaders, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector reviewed a range of school information, policies and documentation, including information on the school's website and leaders' self-evaluation.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector considered and scrutinised a range of documentation, including records and a case study. The inspector spoke to school leaders, staff and governors about their work to keep pupils safe.
- The inspector evaluated results from the online survey for parents and carers, Ofsted Parent View, including 71 free-text comments and responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.
- To gather pupils' views, the inspector spoke to pupils, formally and informally, from different year groups. This included members of the school council.

Inspection team

Jacqueline Bell-Cook, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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