

Inspection of a good school: St Helen's Primary School

Woodbridge Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 2LT

Inspection dates:

3 and 4 July 2023

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

St Helen's is a community in which pupils thrive. Pupils enjoy and are proud to attend their school and are keen to tell visitors about their experiences. They feel safe because of the care and vigilance of staff. Parents, staff and pupils agree that St Helen's is a welcoming place.

Expectations are very clear. Pupils know and can articulate the school values, which are promoted through regular assemblies. They follow them because they think they are important.

Behaviour is excellent. In lessons, pupils listen to their teachers and faithfully follow the classroom routines. During social times, pupils play well together; they are calm and happy. There are always activities they can be involved in.

Pupils have many opportunities to take part in school life. The equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) group is active in the school. The group works hard to support the diverse community. Projects such as the 'complete retreat' and work with local community groups are very successful. This demonstrates the determination of the pupils at St Helen's.

The school also ensures that pupils have experiences beyond the local area through visits to the theatre and to historic sites or museums.

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

The curriculum at St Helen's is well sequenced and planned. Leaders' ambitions are that all pupils benefit from the curriculum. Across all year groups, teachers present knowledge clearly and consistently. Teachers seek out appropriate support when teaching sensitive topics. This creates an environment that focuses on pupils' needs and interests.

In a small number of subjects, teachers do not always know how well pupils have understood the work. Misconceptions are not always addressed systematically. This also means pupils are not always clear about how to improve their work.

Provision for those pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is well planned. Clear targets are in place for individual pupils, and they make good progress towards these. Typically, pupils with SEND work at the same level as their peers.

There is a sharp focus on reading. From the beginning of Nursery, children are introduced to the sounds around them. The way in which formal sounds are introduced is considered and effective. Children in key stage 1 have a regular planned programme of phonics which is well delivered. For those children that require additional support to keep up, staff provide intervention activities during the daily 'reconnect' time. All staff have received training to ensure the phonics programme is delivered effectively.

The school is a calm and orderly environment. Pupils work hard in lessons, and there is no disruptive behaviour. This is consistent across year groups. Children in the nursery can focus for long periods of time; they are patient. They also sit calmly during snack time. Younger pupils interact positively with adults, including visitors. Older pupils focus on their teachers during lessons. They are confident to respond to questions.

The opportunities available for pupils' broader development are exceptional. School leaders have empowered pupils through groups such as the EDI and eco-group. However, leaders also ensure that pupils experience views and knowledge from adults outside the community. Many speakers have visited this year, from medical professionals to faith groups. Pupils benefit substantially as a result. Leaders have clear plans in place to extend this offer further. Leaders also know that too many children are absent from school too often. Those pupils who are persistently absent fall behind in their work. Often, these are the most vulnerable pupils.

The school is well led and managed. School leaders know the children and the community well. Leaders have been tenacious in their approach to school improvement. They understand the challenges faced by the school and approach them effectively. Staff at all stages of their career feel supported by school leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Arrangements for ensuring that appropriate pre-employment checks are undertaken are effective. These checks are recorded accurately. Full records of the school's comprehensive safeguarding training are also held. Staff are aware of the signs that a pupil may be at risk. They know how to report these concerns. Pupils are confident to report concerns to trusted adults. The school provides pupils with appropriate and effective information in relation to keeping themselves safe online. Pupils also understand the role of safeguarding leaders. Where it is necessary to refer a concern to external services, leaders ensure that such referrals are detailed and timely. The quality of safeguarding provision is monitored effectively by the trust.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The persistent absence of vulnerable pupils continues to be high. As a result, some pupils are not able to make good progress. The school needs to ensure there is a robust strategy for addressing the attendance of all pupils.
- The monitoring of pupils' progress and feedback in some subjects is not always consistent. As a result, pupils do not always know how to improve their work. Leaders should ensure that there are rigorous practices in place to ensure pupils are able to build on what they know.

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 St Helen's Primary School to be good in March 2012.

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	141819
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10284266
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	460
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Simon Evans-Evans
Headteacher	Kate Hodgetts
Website	www.sthelensprimary.net
Date of previous inspection	23 January 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of ASSET Education Multi Academy Trust.
- The number of pupils for whom English is an additional language is well above average.
- The number of pupils with an education, health and care plan is below average.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school has received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff, and representatives from the trust and governing body.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders, looked at

curriculum planning, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector spoke with staff and pupils. The inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and reviewed safeguarding records. The inspector also reviewed the single central records of pre-employment checks made on staff and reviewed information about the safer recruitment of staff.
- The inspector met with pupils from different year groups to talk about their learning and experiences at school.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documents provided by the school. These included the school improvement plan, curriculum documentation and school policies.
- The inspector considered 80 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View. This included 43 comments from parents and carers in the free-text facility. The inspector also considered 29 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Jonathan Rockey, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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