

Inspection of St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Junior School

Heath Drive, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 0RL

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 July 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending this warm and friendly junior school. They settle quickly into school life because the teachers ensure that they understand all the rules and routines. Pupils are keen to talk about their learning, and they have a good work ethic.

Pupils respond well to the high expectations of teachers, and they behave well in and around the school. This means that pupils feel safe. If bullying occurs, pupils know that adults will help them to sort it out.

Pupils love all the interesting subjects they learn, and leaders ensure that the curriculum is broad. This means that pupils can develop all their interests and are well prepared for secondary school. Sports and keeping healthy are whole-school priorities. Pupils regularly run a mile and learn about the appropriate food groups to help improve their stamina.

Pupils can hold a range of leadership roles. They carry these out with responsible attitudes and a great deal of enthusiasm. Pupils are very clear about the fact that they learn to accept everyone. Pupils learn that 'we have more in common with others than what sets us apart.' This helps them to understand and connect with all others.

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

Leaders have thought about the skills and knowledge they want pupils to learn in all subject areas. Plans for each subject are sequential and designed to build on pupils' prior knowledge. In some subjects, the steps of knowledge from which teachers plan are quite broad, making it harder for them to ensure they teach, and assess, pupils' understanding of the precise content leaders had intended.

Leaders are clear about how they want the pupils to learn. For instance, teachers make sure that pupils repeat and recall previous learning regularly so that they can remember all the important bits of knowledge. In more established subjects, teachers show good subject knowledge and explain tasks clearly. This means that pupils achieve well. In a few subjects, leaders have recently made changes and are in the process of checking that these are having the positive impact they intend on pupils' achievement.

Reading has a high priority. When pupils start school, their reading ability is checked. Any pupils who are not yet reading fluently have immediate catch-up learning programmes. Pupils learn to blend and decode words phonetically. They practise applying their knowledge when spelling words. Leaders keep this support in place for as long as needed, although pupils usually catch up quickly. When pupils can read confidently and independently, they practise reading with fluency. All pupils are encouraged to develop a love of reading in various ways by, for instance,

teachers reading to them and teachers and pupils recommending books to each other. This rigorous approach means that pupils achieve well in reading.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are, on the whole, well supported by trained and skilled staff. Support staff work together with class teachers to provide scaffolded tasks during lessons. This helps pupils with barriers to learning to achieve as well as their peers. Leaders are aspirational for an inclusive school. However, not all pupils with SEND have individual and specific targets. This means that it can be harder for teachers to adapt their planning and for leaders to measure the progress that pupils make.

Pupils follow a comprehensive personal development programme, and leaders adapt this when needed. Pupils are taught and understand British values, including democracy. Pupils know about differences and talk about gender, disability and race with confidence. Pupils are well prepared for becoming responsible citizens.

Most pupils behave well. In lessons, pupils are calm and respectful. Any low-level disruptive behaviour is dealt with quickly and appropriately and does not slow down lessons. Pupils listen well to each other's viewpoints and try to get along with all others.

Leaders and governors share the same values and vision for the school. They give a high priority to staff well-being and support staff well with their roles.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils learn how to stay safe online and understand that some online games are inappropriate for them. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe in the community, including water safety.

Leaders train staff so that they can recognise and identify vulnerable pupils. Staff report any concerns quickly. Leaders act swiftly when they are worried that a pupil is at risk of harm. Records kept are accurate and appropriate. However, these are not all kept in one place. Leaders recognise that this could slow the process for finding relevant information, and they intend to keep all records in one central system in the future.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, leaders' statements of what they want pupils to learn are broad. This means that non-subject specialist teachers find it hard to plan the exact small steps of knowledge that pupils need to learn, and their assessments

do not have the detailed information teachers need in order to change and adapt what they teach when appropriate.

- Some pupils with SEND do not have clear targets that link to their specific area of need. This means that this important information cannot be shared, and tracking each pupil's progress is difficult. Leaders need to ensure that all pupils with SEND have separate and specific targets that can be used to help maximise their learning.

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

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| Unique reference number | 117409 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 10287100 |
| Type of school | Junior |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 7 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 233 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Linda Butterfield |
| Headteacher | Hannah Orton |
| Website | www.stmarys306.herts.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 1 May 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The school has a Christian religious character. The school's most recent section 48 inspection took place in September 2022. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years.
- Leaders do not currently use any alternative provision.
- Leaders provide a daily breakfast and after-school club.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, who is also the designated safeguarding lead. The lead inspector spoke with some members of the governing

body, including the chair of governors, and held a meeting with the local authority representative.

- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, science, physical education and design and technology. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors also met with the leaders for mathematics, writing and history, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors spoke to leaders and viewed a range of documents and information, including minutes of governing body meetings, school policies, documentation and records relating to safeguarding.
- The lead inspector considered the 103 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the 59 free-text comments.
- The lead inspector also considered the 26 responses to the Ofsted staff survey and 22 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Jessie Linsley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Emma Breckenridge

Ofsted Inspector

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