

Inspection of a good school: Wheatfields Junior Mixed School

Downes Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL4 9NT

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 July 2023

Outcome

Wheatfields Junior Mixed School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils relish learning the interesting and ambitious curriculum at Wheatfields. They behave exceptionally well. All pupils are motivated to succeed. They work hard and make the most of their learning opportunities. They enjoy the increasing number of occasions they have to take their learning outside.

Pupils enjoy opportunities to develop skills and talents through a wide range of trips and clubs. Pupils have a deep understanding of their local area as a result of a planned sequence of trips. They talk knowledgeably about local plants and wildlife as a result of a series of visits to a woodland park.

Pupils develop a love of music. Many of them play instruments and perform regularly for their peers, sometimes as part of the school's orchestra.

Pupils feel safe. They are reassured because they identify key adults they can share any worries with. They are appreciative of the school's strong pastoral support and the opportunity to talk to the well-being mentor if they need to.

Bullying is very rare. Pupils agree that it is unacceptable, and they have confidence in their teachers to keep them safe.

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

Leaders have high expectations for all pupils. They want every child to learn the same ambitious curriculum. In some subject areas, like mathematics and reading, this ambition is fully realised, and pupils learn particularly well.

All staff share leaders' aspirations for reading to be at the heart of the school. Leaders have put in place robust assessment systems to ensure that all pupils learn to read well.

This sits alongside a consistent and structured approach to the teaching of reading. For example, teachers introduce pupils to unfamiliar vocabulary before reading texts. Leaders closely monitor the impact of the extra support they provide to pupils. As a result, pupils become confident with their knowledge of phonics. This leads to high attainment in reading for all pupils.

Pupils demonstrate a genuine love of reading. They read extensively for pleasure. They record considered reflections on their reading in their planners. The school librarian helps pupils to make good book choices.

Pupils generally learn the curriculum well. Leaders have set out what they want pupils to learn in a way that allows pupils' knowledge to build cumulatively over time. This helps pupils to learn and remember more. For example, in geography, pupils revisit map reading skills in successive years. As a result, they use grid references with confidence.

In some subjects, leaders have not been specific enough about the details they want pupils to learn. This leads to some inconsistency in how and when teachers teach these subjects, which leaves gaps in pupils' knowledge. Beyond mathematics and reading, assessment processes do not give leaders enough understanding of how well pupils are learning. Leaders are thus unaware of changes that are required to support pupils to learn better.

Leaders have very high expectations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They ensure that teachers carefully adapt the curriculum to address pupils' specific needs. This enables pupils with SEND to learn the curriculum alongside their peers. For example, some pupils use adapted resources in mathematics. This enables them to solve the same problems as their peers.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards their learning are exemplary. In class, pupils focus on their learning. They are highly motivated and show excellent resilience and independence. Pupils understand the importance of treating each other with kindness and respect. They display this during lunchtime, where all pupils are happy and play without needing adults to intervene.

The school plans carefully for pupils' personal development. Pupils undertake a variety of leadership roles within school. For example, the eco-council has helped to develop the outdoor learning area. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of equalities and know they need to treat all people with respect. Pupils and staff are rightly proud of the inclusive nature of the school community. Pupils value and respect each other and listen carefully to what their peers have to say.

Leaders have created a positive working environment for all staff. Staff say that leaders are supportive of their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide staff with appropriate training. All staff are vigilant in their approach to keeping pupils safe. Meticulous and detailed records include reference to timely actions. Leaders make appropriate referrals to external agencies. They take effective and personalised actions to support individual pupils and families. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe because this is woven throughout the school curriculum and repeated in assemblies.

Leaders ensure that appropriate recruitment procedures are followed. They make the checks they need to ensure that all new staff are safe to work with children.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the specific key concepts that pupils will study have not been identified precisely enough. This leads to variability in what pupils are taught. Leaders should continue with their work to define more precisely what they want pupils to know.
- In foundation subjects, assessment processes do not give leaders sufficient information about what pupils know and remember. This means that leaders do not have an accurate view of how well pupils are learning the curriculum. Leaders should develop assessment systems that help them to identify how effectively the curriculum is being implemented in order to make changes where required.

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 predecessor school, Wheatfields Junior Mixed School, to be good in January 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	146878
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10269026
Type of school	Junior
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	359
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Lin Keen
Headteacher	Janice Tearle
Website	www.wheatfieldsjm.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Alban Academies Trust.
- Wheatfields Junior Mixed School converted to become an academy school in September 2020. When it's predecessor school, Wheatfields Junior Mixed School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors 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 his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with leaders, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, special educational needs and disabilities coordinators and five governors. He also met with the chief executive officer of the trust and the chair of the trust.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and computing. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders, scrutinised curriculum documentation, visited lessons, spoke to teachers, talked to pupils about their learning and looked at pupils' work. The inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- The inspector also met with the subject leaders of science and geography, reviewed curriculum documentation and sampled pupils' work.
- The inspector met with leaders responsible for safeguarding and looked at safeguarding records, staff training logs and the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks.
- The inspector met with a range of pupils to discuss their views. This included formal meetings and informal discussions during playtime, lunchtime and in lessons.
- The inspector spoke to parents and staff to gather their views. The inspector also considered the 189 responses and 189 free-text responses to the Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and 34 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Mark Sim, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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