

Inspection of a good school: Berwick St Mary's Church of England First School

Newfields, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland TD15 1SP

Inspection date: 11 July 2023

Outcome

Berwick St Mary's Church of England First School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a very happy school. Adults know the pupils well and make sure that they are well looked after. There is a caring and nurturing environment, and pupils treat each other kindly.

Leaders want the best for all pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are fully included. Parents of pupils with SEND are very positive about their child's experiences at the school. One parent commented that since their child with SEND had started at the school, they had their 'happy little boy back'.

Pupils are taught what bullying is. There is very little bullying, and pupils are confident that if it did occur, it would be dealt with by staff. All pupils spoken to could name an adult in school that they trust and who they could speak to about worries or concerns.

Pupils enjoy the opportunities on offer. They spoke with enthusiasm about trips to Holy Island, the Great North Museum and the Laing Art Gallery. Leaders ensure that pupils visit a range of culturally interesting places. Many pupils enjoy sports sessions with visiting coaches. Pupils show great pride when discussing community work, such as visiting elderly people with dementia.

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

Pupils are taught in mixed-year-group classes and follow a precisely developed curriculum. Leaders have thought carefully about how to ensure that all pupils in the class can access the work. In lessons, teachers use well-designed resources to ensure that knowledge and skills are developed at an appropriate level. For example, in an English lesson, both Year 3 and Year 4 pupils were working on a novel. The teacher made sure that Year 3 pupils could understand inference skills. The Year 4 pupils were able to apply their inference skills more independently.

Children in nursery and pupils in reception get off to a good start. Teachers encourage them to use mathematical language from an early age and to say what skills they are using. In other curriculum areas, the use of subject-specific language is also encouraged, such as the language of habitats and position in geography. In some subject areas, this is not precise enough to inform the development of the curriculum. On occasion, pupils are not always given the opportunity to use their subject knowledge when drawing conclusions about their work. Leaders are aware of this.

Leaders have prioritised reading. Staff are well trained in the delivery of phonics, and pupils are regularly assessed to check how secure their knowledge is. Staff deliver phonics sessions with precision and consistency. Children in nursery begin learning sounds straightaway and enjoy putting the sound of their initial into 'silly soup' while stirring it and singing. The books that pupils take home to read are well matched to the sounds that they know. Staff have strategies in place to engage parents with reading and are aware of those pupils who may not read at home as much as they would like. These pupils are given additional opportunities to read to an adult in school.

Pupils with SEND are well supported with their reading and access to the wider curriculum. Staff know pupils' needs well. More pupils are starting school with speech and language delays. Leaders have ensured that staff have been trained to best support these pupils.

Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Pupils demonstrate great respect for all. This is fostered through religious education 'wonder days', where pupils can fully explore all faiths and religions. Pupils have the opportunity to earn the Archbishop of York Young Leaders Award. Pupils at the school recently won the Christian Aid Global Neighbours Award.

Governors are committed to the school and its pupils. They, along with all staff in the school, are ambitious for all pupils to reach their potential and leave fully prepared for their next steps. Staff are very positive about working at the school and feel well supported by leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know pupils very well, and all take responsibility for their welfare. There is a well-considered personal development programme in place. This teaches pupils how to stay safe in their community and online. Staff have appropriate safeguarding training and are vigilant to any signs that may be worrying.

All staff know how to report a concern and referrals are made to external agencies where appropriate. The headteacher knows families in the community well and ensures that he is present in the mornings. Parents know they can approach him with any queries or concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some curriculum areas do not use assessment effectively enough to check how well pupils have remembered important knowledge. This means that staff do not review and adapt the curriculum as effectively as they could. Leaders need to ensure that staff use assessment consistently well to check what pupils know to inform further curriculum development.
- In some subjects, pupils are not using precise subject knowledge when completing evaluative tasks. As a result, pupils are not making connections between knowledge that would help them to demonstrate their learning. Where this occurs, leaders need to ensure that pupils are given opportunities to apply their subject-specific knowledge regularly to draw precise conclusions.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in April 2017.

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	122271
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	10228001
Type of school	First
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	83
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing	Joyce Guthrie
Headteacher	Gary Hilton
Website	www.berwickstmarysschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 and 27 April 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller than average first school.
- The school uses no alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, the inspectors carried out deep dives into these subjects: reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to pupils read to a trusted adult.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the chair and other representatives of the local governing body and spoke to a representative from the local authority and the diocese.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during lessons, around the school and at lunchtime. The inspectors spoke to pupils about their behaviour.

- To evaluate safeguarding, the inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead, scrutinised the single central record of recruitment checks, looked at a sample of safeguarding records and talked to pupils and staff.
- The inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including parent's free text responses. The inspectors also took account of responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.
- An inspector talked to parents at the school gate.

Inspection team

Jessica McKay, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

John Downs

Ofsted Inspector

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