

Inspection of St Nicholas Elstree Church of England VA Primary School

St Nicholas Close, Elstree, Hertfordshire WD6 3EW

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 October 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Insufficient evidence

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and feel safe here. The whole school joins together regularly, celebrating individual successes and sharing important messages. Pupils' behaviour in class and around the school reflects the school rules – 'be safe, be kind, and be respectful'. Pupils say that although sometimes there are disagreements and arguments between themselves, these are never serious. Older pupils are kind with the younger ones, for example when 'badgers' visit 'hedgehogs' to be their reading buddies.

Teachers expect everyone to get on and do their best within the mixed-age classes. However, in some subjects, the tasks set are not ambitious enough. When this happens, the oldest pupils lose interest, and consequently do not achieve as well as they should. Effective support is given to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who struggle with behaviour. However, these pupils do not get as much help with improving the quality of their work and as a result they do not make good progress.

Visiting teachers offer individual music tuition. A small number of clubs are available, including multi-sports, chess, and computer coding. However, the range of activities does not go beyond this. Pupils say they would like more.

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

Since the previous inspection, the school has faced significant challenges. The school roll has fallen, requiring several reorganisations of teaching groups. A new curriculum is in place that, over two or three years, plans that all national curriculum content can be covered.

Staff have received training to teach the new curriculum, including how to assess what pupils know and remember. However, in some foundation subjects, longer-term curriculum plans lack detail and only cover this year. The order of topics taught is not always clear and has not always been well thought through with clear aims in mind. Therefore, pupils do not routinely build up their knowledge securely over time.

In some subjects, staff are deployed effectively to provide support for different-aged pupils. However, this is not consistently the case. The oldest, more knowledgeable, pupils are not always given the demanding tasks they need to produce work of the highest quality. While they are not disruptive in class, this sometimes leads to these pupils becoming disinterested with their learning. Occasionally, when work for younger pupils lacks ambition, they become distracted and need reminding about their behaviour.

While standards of reading, writing and mathematics are showing some signs of improvement, these are still not as high as they should be. A new phonics scheme has been introduced, starting when children join in Reception. The school library contains a good range of books for older, more confident, readers to choose from.

Although staff are confident about using the new resources, some inconsistencies remain, for example how and when to teach pupils to spell and write blended letter sounds. Sometimes, pupils are asked to copy words without understanding which letters represent each sound. Not all staff have received detailed training in how to use the new resources effectively.

Since the pandemic, increasing numbers of pupils have needed a lot of help with their behaviour or with their social and emotional well-being. Support for pupils with these special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is accurately identified and well-organised. This includes effective links with outside agencies and alternative provision. Staff have worked effectively to make the school a calmer environment where pupils are safe and are cared for. However, while teaching assistants provide effective support in improving behaviour, less attention is paid on helping these pupils access the curriculum. Consequently, these pupils do not do as well as they should.

Some aspects of provision for pupils' personal development are particularly strong, including moral and spiritual guidance. An appropriate programme for pupils' personal, social and health education is in place. Some topics are taught to separate year groups, such as relationships education. However, other topics are taught to all pupils together. Therefore, the work is not always ambitious enough for some pupils. As a result, they do not have enough opportunities to build up knowledge of, and discuss, the world around them.

Staff are happy here and feel that the school is considerate of their well-being. While past challenges have been correctly identified and tackled, future planning by leaders and governors is not precise enough. The school has not given priority to improving the quality of education, and timescales for bringing about improvements are not precise enough.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum for older pupils is not always ambitious enough. Similarly, younger pupils are not always given enough guidance. This results in older pupils becoming bored, and younger pupils' behaviour wanes. The school needs to ensure that, in mixed-age classes, activities are adapted to accurately match the needs of learners.
- Detailed planning in some foundation subjects is incomplete. It does not go beyond the current school year. The rationale for the order of teaching topics in these subjects is not clear. Pupils may not build securely upon the knowledge that

they gain. The school should ensure that detailed plans are in place for all curriculum subjects.

- While much work has been done to improve the behaviour and well-being of pupils with SEND, not enough emphasis has been placed on providing strategies to ensure that pupils with SEND can access the curriculum. The school should review its strategy and practice for intervention and support for pupils with SEND, ensuring that staff are trained to enable these pupils to make the progress that they should across the curriculum.
- Planning for the school's development is not sharp enough. More emphasis needs to be given to strategies for improving pupils' achievement. Dates by which improvements are expected are imprecise, which makes it difficult to hold leaders and governors to account. The school's development plan should be revised so that it focuses on the most important improvements needed and gives a clear expectation of when those improvements should be achieved.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	117431
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10286249
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	68
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	David Aplin and Geoff Strack (Joint Chairs)
Headteacher	Kate Johnston-Grant
Website	http://www.stnicholas610.herts.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	1 May 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Although registered for pupils from age three, the school is not currently offering Nursery provision.
- There are currently very few children in Reception.
- The number of pupils on roll has declined. There has been a reorganisation of the classes. Pupils are taught in mixed-age year groups.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provider.
- The school received its last section 48 inspection of church schools on 16 January 2023.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, and history. Each deep dive included meeting with subject leaders, visiting lessons, speaking with teachers and pupils, and looking at pupils' work.
- The inspectors also sampled plans and looked at pupils' workbooks in other areas of the curriculum.
- Inspectors met with the joint chairs of the governing body and a parent governor, spoke on the telephone to a representative from the diocese, and met with representatives from the local authority. Inspectors also spoke to the provider of alternative education used by the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff, and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered 16 responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents and 11 responses to Ofsted's inspection survey for school staff.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their experience of school and their learning and observed their behaviour in classrooms and around the school.

Inspection team

Mark Phillips, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Daniel Short

His Majesty's Inspector

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