

Inspection of Applecroft School

Applecroft Road, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire AL8 6JZ

Inspection dates: 28 and 29 November 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Lisa Withe. This school is part of a single-academy trust, Applecroft School. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees chaired by Louise Gardner.

Ofsted has not previously inspected Applecroft School as an academy under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as, until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection of the predecessor school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and safe within their 'Applecroft family'. They make meaningful and valuable contributions to the school and to the broader community. For example, they are currently designing a stained-glass window for a local church. Pupils see themselves as leaders. They write letters and petition school leaders to encourage them to make the school more sustainable.

The school expects all pupils to achieve well. Pupils learn an ambitious set of vocabulary in all subjects. They are excited when they locate these words during their learning. They feel proud that they understand them.

Pupils are caring towards each other. Older pupils look after the younger ones. They make sure the younger pupils get the help they need. Pupils are confident that the school deals with any rare bullying incidents so that they do not recur.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe both online and offline. They learn, for example, about the risks around water and train lines because these are dangers they may encounter in the local area.

Pupils learn about the lives of people who are different to them. They talk maturely about the importance of mutual respect and understanding. Visits to local places of worship support and embed this learning.

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

The school has made significant changes to the curriculum in the last 18 months. The curriculum it has adopted is ambitious. Generally, in most subjects, pupils are learning it well.

The school prioritises teaching pupils to read. Leaders have chosen a well-sequenced phonics curriculum. This ensures that pupils learn the letter sounds quickly. Typically, the teaching of phonics is effective. Sometimes, the opportunities for pupils to practise and rehearse sounds during lessons do not happen as leaders intend. However, effective checking procedures identify pupils who have fallen behind. Additional teaching, often led by a specialist reading teacher, supports pupils to catch up. As a result, many pupils learn to read with confidence. Older pupils are passionate about reading and read for pleasure daily. Teachers read to pupils daily as part of an effective reading curriculum. Teachers model how to read with expression. This curriculum ensures that pupils typically attain well and read a range of high-quality texts.

The school has ensured that the new curriculum is well sequenced in all subjects, starting in the early years. Pupils learn key knowledge for each subject. As a result, they remember what they have been taught and are generally achieving well. In some subjects, teachers lack the expert subject knowledge they need to adapt their

teaching. Where this happens, a few pupils are unable to recall the key knowledge that they have been taught.

The school has high expectations for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers adapt their lessons carefully. This ensures that pupils with SEND learn well. For example, additional adults anticipate sensory needs, which helps pupils to regulate their emotions. This realises the school's aim that pupils with SEND should not stand out from their peers as they learn.

Pupils are polite, friendly and confident. They open doors for visitors and enquire as to how they are. Pupils behave well in lessons. Low-level disruption is very rare. A small number of the younger children need frequent reminders of the expectations. Older pupils are motivated and resilient learners who focus on the task at hand. These pupils quickly settle to focus on their learning in response to staff's instruction.

The school takes effective action to ensure that pupils attend regularly. As a result, attendance is strong and improving.

The school caters exceptionally well for the personal development of pupils. Leaders have carefully planned a wide range of additional opportunities for pupils. These opportunities are available to all, and participation levels are high. There are several strands which weave together to create an impressive offer. For example, pupils play a central role in the leadership at lunchtime. They perform eight separate leadership roles. This includes using radios to control the flow of pupils into the lunch hall. Lunchtimes are calm and happy as a result. There is an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. The school carefully tracks all pupils to ensure that everyone benefits from what is on offer.

The knowledgeable governing body understands its statutory and broader responsibilities. Governors support the school well. Governors help leaders to ensure that the school continues to improve.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not have the precise subject knowledge to teach the more specialised aspects of the new curriculum confidently and well. As a result of this, a few pupils do not remember what they have been taught as well as they should. Leaders should provide teachers with the training and support they require so that they implement all areas of the new curriculum effectively.

- Leaders do not yet have a precise understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses in the newly introduced curriculum. As a result, they cannot accurately prioritise training and support for staff. Leaders should make further use of assessment, alongside rigorous monitoring and evaluation, to ensure they have an accurate picture of how effectively the newly designed curriculum is being implemented.

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	137943
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10255023
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	454
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of trust	Louise Gardner
Headteacher	Lisa Withe
Website	www.applecroft.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act.

Information about this school

- The school offers before- and after-school childcare provision for its pupils which is run by an external provider, and which is registered separately to the school.
- The school uses one alternative provision.

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 met with leaders, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, and members of the governing body.

- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, computing, music and religious education. 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 lead inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector/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 reviewed a range of school documentation, including the school development plan, self-evaluation form and reports to the governing body.
- The inspectors held discussions with pupils, including in lessons and during breaktimes. Inspectors also reviewed the 202 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- To gather the views of staff, the inspectors took account of the 45 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and held discussions with several of the staff.
- The inspectors spoke to parents to gather their views. The inspectors also considered the 216 responses, including 192 free-text responses to the survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Mark Sim, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Georgina Nutton	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Fykin	Ofsted Inspector

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