

Inspection of St John's CofE Primary School

Heath Road, Sandbach, Cheshire CW11 2LE

Inspection dates: 26 September, and 6 and 7 December 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy learning. They appreciate the support that staff provide if they come across challenges or difficulties in their lives. However, the school does not have high enough expectations of pupils' academic success. Pupils experience a curriculum that lacks ambition. It is poorly designed. Staff do not have the knowledge and skills to make sure that pupils gain a deep body of knowledge. Pupils' achievement is poor.

Children in the early years get a better deal, despite the weaknesses in the overall quality of education. Children experience a more coherent curriculum with purposeful learning activities.

The school has not put in place a suitable behaviour system or clear routines that are understood by staff and pupils. Pupils regularly experience disruption to their learning. Despite these weaknesses, pupils stated that they feel happy in school.

Pupils experience limited opportunities outside of the academic curriculum to go on trips or visits which would enhance their learning. Pupils do not learn about fundamental British values. They are ill-prepared for life in modern Britain.

The school does not safeguard pupils effectively. Over time, the school has not taken sufficient action to protect pupils' and staff's welfare, health and safety. For example, the school has not followed up when vulnerable pupils have been absent from school. The local authority and the Diocese of Chester have taken action to remedy weaknesses in the school's safeguarding procedures. However, it is too early to see if this is making a difference to pupils and staff.

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

The school has not taken effective action to address the recommended areas for improvement from the last inspection. Many of these weaknesses remain. The school's slow efforts to improve the curriculum and pupils' behaviour have been compounded by turbulence in leadership. As a result, many pupils do not benefit from a good-enough quality of education. The school, including governors, does not have the capacity, expertise or knowledge to improve the quality of education by itself. It is heavily reliant on the support of the local authority, and the Diocese of Chester, to tackle the shortcomings.

The curriculum lacks ambition and coherence. In the majority of subjects, the school has not made sure that staff understand the important knowledge that pupils in Years 1 to 6 should know and when this subject content should be taught. This means that staff do not have the guidance that they need to ensure that they design learning that helps pupils to learn all that they should.

In the absence of suitable training and support, staff are left to their own devices to design suitable learning activities for pupils. Some teachers do not do this well. This

leads to pupils experiencing disconnected lessons that do not help them to build securely on what came before, or to prepare them for what they will learn next. Staff are ill-equipped to identify what pupils already know and can do. For example, staff are unable to identify the gaps in pupils' learning. As a result, the achievement of pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), is poor. Pupils are ill-prepared for the next steps in their education.

The school does not ensure that staff have the necessary training to be able to identify the needs of pupils with SEND accurately. In some subjects, staff make suitable adaptations to their teaching to enable pupils with SEND to learn alongside their peers. However, for pupils with more complex additional needs, support from staff is weak. This results in these pupils making little or no progress towards the targets set out in their education, health and care plans.

While the overall curriculum for pupils is poor, the school has taken steps to implement a suitable phonics programme and early reading curriculum. Pupils begin to learn phonics as soon as they start at the school. They develop a love of reading through the books, stories and rhymes that staff share with them. Staff are alert to any pupil who may not be keeping up with the phonics programme. Staff intervene quickly so that pupils receive effective and timely support. Struggling readers access books which are well matched to their current understanding of phonics. This helps them to gain confidence and to read with increasing fluency.

The curriculum in the early years has been strengthened in recent times. This curriculum is beginning to support children's learning and development in a more structured way than previously. Staff have benefited from valuable training and support from external consultants to strengthen the early years offer. This is bringing about positive changes to the quality of education that children in the early years receive. As a result, more children are better prepared for the demands of Year 1. Even so, children could achieve better.

The school does not support staff to manage pupils' behaviour. There is an absence of clear policies and procedures to promote positive behaviour. This, coupled with low expectations, means that staff are free to deal with incidents of misbehaviour as they wish. Often, these strategies are unsuccessful. As a result, the learning of some pupils is disrupted by the poor behaviour of others.

Added to this, the school does not have a close enough understanding of why some pupils do not attend school regularly or on time. This means that the school is unable to spot patterns in behaviour and absence, which in turn means that the strategies to bring about improvement are not effective enough.

The opportunities that the school has set out to teach and nurture pupils' personal development are ineffective. For example, the school does not ensure that pupils learn about different religions, faiths or cultures. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to participate in meaningful extra-curricular activities. Pupils do not receive a wide and rich set of experiences to enhance their personal development.

Governors do not understand or carry out their statutory responsibilities effectively. They do not have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. They have not provided sufficient challenge to leaders to improve the quality of education for pupils. Since the last inspection, governors have overseen a decline in the school's effectiveness.

Staff morale is low. External support and interim leadership arrangements are providing staff with increasing reassurance that their views will be listened to by the school. Staff are eager and keen to support improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Staff know how to identify the signs of potential harm to pupils. They report their concerns to the school. However, records show that these concerns have not been logged or dealt with appropriately. This puts vulnerable pupils at considerable risk of harm.

Governors do not understand their duties in respect of safeguarding. For example, they do not ensure that safer recruitment processes are in place when appointing new staff. Governors do not receive appropriate induction or safeguarding training. They do not know how effectively the school safeguards pupils.

Over time, there has been a laissez-faire approach to safeguarding. A lack of appropriate safeguarding training, combined with weak communication about safeguarding arrangements and ineffective processes and procedures, has put pupils and staff at risk of harm. Recently, some external safeguarding audits have been completed. This work has been complemented with advice and support to strengthen safeguarding arrangements. Even so, it is early days, and too soon to see if this is making a difference to a legacy of poor safeguarding practices.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school, including those responsible for governance, does not fulfil its statutory duties to safeguard pupils and staff's welfare and well-being. This puts pupils and staff at risk of harm. The school, including governors, must take immediate steps to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils and staff.
- The school has not made sure that staff know what pupils need to learn. As a result, pupils receive a disconnected series of lessons that do not build their knowledge and understanding. They do not achieve well. The school must ensure that there is a shared understanding of what should be taught and when this should happen.
- In key stages 1 and 2, teachers have not received the support or the guidance that they need to implement the curriculum well. This means that pupils

underachieve considerably. The school must ensure that staff are well trained to deliver the curriculum. It must also ensure that staff know how to assess pupils' learning accurately and effectively.

- The school does not identify the additional needs of pupils with SEND accurately. Staff do not have the knowledge that they need to understand complex special educational needs. This means that staff do not meet the learning needs of pupils with SEND. The school should take immediate action to ensure that pupils with SEND are identified quickly and that they receive the support that they need to achieve well.
- The provision for pupils' personal development is poor. As a result, pupils are ill-prepared for life in modern Britain. The school must design and implement a suitable programme to promote pupils' personal development. This is to ensure that they have a wide and rich set of experiences that prepare them for life.
- Pupils' behaviour is not acceptable. As a result, pupils' conduct in lessons and around the school is poor. This interrupts pupils' learning and compounds their weak achievement. The school must implement clear policies and procedures which are understood by pupils and staff alike.
- Leaders, including governors, do not keep a close enough track on pupils' rates of attendance. This puts some pupils at risk of harm. The school should implement strategies to understand why pupils fail to attend and to follow up swiftly on any pupils' absences.
- Governance is ineffective. As a result, governors have overseen a decline in the quality of education. Governors must take swift action to improve their oversight of the quality of education that pupils receive.

The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

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	111334
Local authority	Cheshire East
Inspection number	10294270
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	187
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Margaret Cruxton
Headteacher	Rob Whittle
Website	www.stjohnssandbachheath.cheshire.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	21 and 22 September 2021, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- At the time of this inspection, the local authority, and the Diocese of Chester, had secured external support by commissioning an interim headteacher to work with the school.
- The substantive headteacher was unavailable at the time of this inspection.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Chester. Its last section 48 inspection took place in 2016. The next section 48 inspection will be scheduled to take place by the end of 2024.
- The school runs a before- and after-school club for pupils.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for pupils.

Information about this inspection

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

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is

failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- This inspection began on 26 September. It was resumed on 6 and 7 December 2023, when two His Majesty's Inspectors returned to gather additional evidence.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at a sample of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects. They spoke with leaders and pupils. Inspectors reviewed samples of pupils' work in these curriculum areas.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read to a trusted adult.
- Inspectors met with the interim headteacher and other leaders. Inspectors also met with a group of governors, including the chair of governors.
- 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 observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including that relating to behaviour and attendance. Inspectors also examined the school's self-evaluation document and the school improvement plan.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. Inspectors also spoke with parents and carers at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for pupils and for staff.

Inspection team

Sue Dymond, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Vicky Briggs	Ofsted Inspector
Jackie Stillings	His Majesty's Inspector

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