

Inspection of a good school: St Barnabas CofE VA Primary School

Quarry Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 2EY

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 January 2024

Outcome

St Barnabas CofE VA Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to attend this welcoming, safe and inclusive school. They value their caring teachers, who work hard to make learning both interesting and enjoyable. The school values of 'aspiration, love, trust, perseverance, compassion and reconciliation' are well understood by pupils. Everyone has a strong sense of belonging to their school community. As one pupil said, 'Everyone is kind here, and I try to return that kindness.'

The school has an ambitious curriculum. It has high expectations of what pupils will learn right from the start of early years. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well. They always try hard to do their best.

Pupils enjoy attending a variety of extra-curricular activities such as boxing, cheerleading, drama and basketball. These help to develop pupils' talents and interests well. The school offers a rich set of wider experiences within its curriculum. Trips to theatres, galleries and historical sites help to bring learning to life.

Pupils value the many faiths and cultures in their school. They are curious to learn more about each other and about different ways of life. Parents also endorse the school's work and inclusive nature. One parent commented, 'My child has a richness given to her'.

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

The school has put in place a carefully considered and ambitious curriculum. It is well sequenced across nearly all subjects. Pupils build well on what they already know, developing increasingly sophisticated understanding. This means that all pupils, including those with SEND, remember their learning well. By the time they reach the end of key stage 2, pupils are well prepared for secondary school. In just a couple of subjects, however, the curriculum is not designed with the same high degree of precision and expectation. School leaders are aware of this and have plans in place to make the curriculum equally strong across all subjects.

Teachers explain ideas clearly and check regularly that pupils have understood. The school makes sure that resources and activities are of a high quality and help pupils to learn well. Staff encourage pupils to use the correct terminology in subjects. In mathematics, pupils are routinely asked to explain their thinking, using precise mathematical language. Right from the start of early years, pupils develop their mathematical understanding well. Pupils relish getting to grips with 'the big ideas' in subjects such as history. For example, pupils in key stage 2 have a keen understanding of how bias and propaganda were used during wartime.

The school ensures that reading is prioritised. Most pupils become confident and keen readers. From early years onwards, children follow a clear approach to learning phonic sounds. Staff are well trained in delivering the school's phonics programme. However, although the school quickly spots any pupil who falls behind in their reading, the extra help that pupils receive is not as effective as it could be.

Expectations of how pupils should behave are consistently high. Across the school, relationships between adults and pupils are warm and respectful. Almost all pupils focus keenly on their learning. Staff encourage pupils and celebrate their successes. From early years, routines are well established. Pupils know what to expect and can quickly develop a high level of independence. Very occasionally, pupils with SEND find it difficult to behave as the school expects. Staff deal with this sensitively and calmly. Most pupils attend school regularly. However, despite the school's best efforts, a minority of pupils do not attend regularly enough. This means that they miss important learning and develop gaps in their understanding.

Pupils' personal development is well considered by the school. Staff make sure that disadvantaged pupils benefit regularly from the wider curriculum offer. Pupils enjoy many outdoor learning opportunities, such as planting bulbs in the local park. Pupils have various leadership opportunities, such as the eco-council and reading buddies. While pupils consider these roles to be important, they could be developed even further. The school provides helpful pastoral support to pupils and their families when they need it. Pupils are taught about ways to stay safe, including when online. They understand about healthy relationships. Older pupils feel that the school has prepared them well for growing up. They trust any member of staff to help them if they have a problem.

School leaders and governors put pupils at the heart of the decisions they make. The school actively seeks out opportunities in the local community that will benefit pupils and their families. School leaders are very considerate of staff's well-being and workload. Staff are unanimously proud to work here.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The support that the school uses to help the weakest readers to catch up is not as effective as it could be because adults do not focus on the specific gaps in pupils' knowledge. This means that pupils who struggle with reading do not catch up as quickly as they could. The school should ensure that support in phonics is precisely targeted to the sounds that pupils do not know.
- A minority of pupils do not attend school regularly enough. This means that they miss valuable learning and develop gaps in their knowledge. The school should continue to seek out the most effective strategies to ensure that all pupils attend regularly.

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 school to be good in November 2014.

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	118724
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10296276
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	205
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Father John Caster
Headteacher	Moira Duncombe
Website	www.st-barnabas.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 October 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Barnabas is a Church of England primary school within the Diocese of Rochester.
- The school's last section 48 inspection under the Education Act for schools of a religious character took place in June 2023.
- The school runs its own breakfast and after-school club.
- The school does not currently have any pupils attending alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- 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. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in her evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with leaders, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and other subject leaders.
- The inspector met with three members of the governing body, including the chair.

- The inspector spoke to representatives from the Diocese of Rochester and Kent local authority.
- Deep dives were carried out in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. She also looked more widely at a range of pupils' work in different subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: 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.
- The inspector gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour and the school's wider curriculum.
- The inspector talked to pupils and staff throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school. This included the views of staff submitted via Ofsted's confidential surveys.
- The inspector considered the views of parents submitted to Ofsted's parent survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Maria Roberts, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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