

Inspection of Cunningham Hill Infant School

Cell Barnes Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 5QJ

Inspection dates: 30 and 31 January 2024

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since March 2009.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish here. They are happy and kept safe. This is because there are many caring and skilled adults who are there to help them.

Adults are highly ambitious for every pupil. They make expectations clear and consistent for pupils, showing kindness. Pupils' excellent attitudes to learning show that they are extremely keen to learn. Pupils achieve very well and produce consistently high-quality work because the curriculum planned by leaders is interesting and challenging. This includes those pupils with special educational needs and or/disabilities (SEND) and/or those who are disadvantaged.

Pupils learn the important values of be ready, be respectful, be safe, love learning and be your best. These values are interwoven through every aspect of school life. They are also realised through the carefully thought out development opportunities that the school has planned for pupils, such as being kind to each other and respecting everyone.

Pupils have the chance to show their talents, especially in music, where they give an annual performance to the whole-school community and a local care home. Adults encourage pupils to have high aspirations in all areas of learning. Pupils are extremely well prepared for their future lives.

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

The school's curriculum is meticulously planned. It is extremely ambitious. Subject leaders are knowledgeable and are seen as experts within the school and, for some, across the federation. They have identified the essential content to be learned. The curriculum planning starts with the early years and sets out when the necessary knowledge and skills should be taught for pupils to learn. This ensures that pupils build up secure knowledge over time. Consequently, pupils achieve well.

The school regularly reviews the curriculum and immediately takes action if adjustments are required. Similarly, teachers continually check what pupils have learned. Lessons are constructed so there are no limits to what pupils can achieve. This challenge ensures that all pupils have the level of learning that is appropriate to their ability and needs. Lessons are adapted to address any misconceptions as they arise.

The school has cultivated a genuine love for reading. This is prioritised as soon as children in early years begin school. Adults who deliver the programme are well trained and teach the phonics curriculum consistently and with precision. They check that pupils are keeping up. Those at risk of falling behind are well supported to catch up quickly. Pupils practise reading using books that are closely matched to the sounds that they have learned. This means that pupils learn to read with accuracy, fluency and confidence.

Pupils with SEND learn the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. The school identifies their needs quickly and puts strategies in place to support them. Leaders review these regularly, with teachers and parents, to ensure that they continue to meet pupils' needs.

Children in the early years get off to a fantastic start. The school has added additional challenge across all areas of the early years provision, such as more direct mathematics and adult-led activities. As a result, there are high levels of engagement from children, who are keen to show what they learn. They participate in a wide range of learning activities that present considerable levels of challenge, such as building a large-scale castle.

Behaviour is excellent. Pupils are highly engaged in their learning. They are extremely responsive to their teachers' instructions and guidance. Pupils are respectful to adults and to each other in classrooms and around the school. Lessons proceed without disruption, allowing pupils to learn and grow.

Provision for pupils' personal development is exceptional. From the early years upwards, pupils learn about relationships and their own emotions and feelings, including healthy lifestyles, in an age-appropriate way. A wide variety of enrichment activities are available and appreciated by pupils. Pupils have opportunities for leadership responsibilities. They are voted by peers to sit on councils, or they can be a salad helper at lunchtime because of how hard they have worked. These opportunities form part of the school's character building curriculum in accordance to its underlying values, ensuring that pupils feel proud of their achievements in all areas of their education.

Leaders, including those responsible for governance, have created an ambitious culture that puts pupils' learning at the forefront. Leaders at all levels share a commitment to ongoing school improvement. They have a detailed and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and the areas they want to continue to improve further.

Staff are proud to work here and appreciate the support for their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	1172
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10255037
Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Rondi Allan
Executive Headteacher	Justine Elbourne-Cload
Website	https://cunninghamhill.herts.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	March 2009, under Section 5 of the Education Act

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, the school joined the Cunningham Hill Schools Federation in September 2020.
- There has been a change in governance, with a new chair and changes in the school leadership team. The new executive headteacher joined the school in September 2020.
- The school uses one registered approved alternative provider.

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.

- Inspectors met with a range of leaders, including senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, and governors, including the chair of governors. The lead inspector met with the school effectiveness adviser.
- An inspector spoke with the alternative provider on the phone.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, music and geography. An inspector looked at a range of documents from art, design and technology, and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders and head of schools, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took into account the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which leaders have created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents and policies, including the school improvement plan and minutes of the governing body minutes.
- Inspectors also considered Ofsted's surveys for parents and staff.

Inspection team

Suzanne Thrower, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Laura Hewer

Ofsted Inspector

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