

Inspection of St Paul's Walden Primary School

Bendish Lane, Whitwell, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 8HX

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 March 2024

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils join a school where they learn to be positive, resilient individuals. They attend school regularly. Pupils arrive happily in the mornings and enter school chatting cheerfully. They live out the school values in the local community too. Pupils eagerly take part in church and village events. These include a Christingle celebration and the annual 'Whitfest' music show. Feeling part of the school and local community helps pupils feel happy, safe and valued.

The nurturing environment and supportive community encourage pupils to be respectful and responsible. Pupils discuss the ways people differ kindly. This prepares them well for encountering people and places outside the surrounding villages. Pupils take on various roles, such as school councillors and sports leaders. These responsibilities allow them to contribute positively to school life. Buddying older pupils with younger ones ensures children feel comfortable from the moment they start the Reception Year.

Pupils benefit greatly from how leaders have improved the curriculum. It shows, for example, in pupils confidently reading the books they receive or demonstrating how they calculate accurately in mathematics. Children in the Reception Year learn to 'have a go' because staff offer encouragement. Children progress well because staff skilfully guide them to add to their words, ideas and creations.

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

Leaders, including governors, galvanised school improvement. They work effectively with the local authority to identify and resolve issues. Leaders have put to bed shortfalls identified at the previous inspection. For example, there is a suite of effective events that support parental engagement. These include the monthly drop-in, half-termly coffee mornings and termly open class events. These allow parents to explore their child's learning and share feedback. Furthermore, leaders cultivate a happy workforce. Staff see how teamwork is key for ensuring the smooth running of the school. They happily lend a helping hand. They do this because they appreciate how leaders cater for their professional training and personal needs.

The school sensibly compiled its curriculum. Leaders have adopted high-quality schemes of work and produced some of their own. Considered two-year cycles ensure pupils in the mixed-age classes learn suitable content. The clarity in the curriculum means staff understand what to teach. It helps them to plan activities that support pupils' learning. However, leaders accept how the open-ended approach to assessment in some subjects is unhelpful. It does not neatly capture what pupils have learned to efficiently inform teaching. Because of this, staff are not routinely aware of what content they should home in on to maximise pupils' learning.

Over the past four years, pupils' achievement in reading has improved steadily. The reading journey begins in the early years. Staff balance teaching the sounds letters make with expanding children's vocabulary through storytelling and engaging

activities. When they are ready, pupils receive books they can read with increasing fluency. As pupils age, staff continue to provide frequent opportunities for reading and discussion. This develops pupils' ability to understand the texts they read.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve soundly. Parents appreciate the care and education staff provide. Leaders' effective networking means staff receive useful training, such as how best to assist pupils with speech, language and communication needs. Leaders recognise a need to adjust how staff arrange the additional support for pupils with SEND. Currently, some targets lack a clear measure by which to focus support and gauge progress. This limits how well staff may efficiently review and adjust support to ensure pupils with SEND achieve their very best.

Pupils' behaviour is calm and orderly. They respond well to the system of rewards and sanctions. Pupils proudly collect their cards for following the rules. They appreciate the individual and whole-class rewards. These include wearing non-school uniform or enjoying a film with popcorn.

Leaders worked determinedly to reset expectations about school attendance. A staggered approach to concern letters, telephone calls and in-person meetings allows the school to tackle attendance issues head on. Consequently, pupils' attendance rates are improving.

The school's personal development programme provides pupils with various positive experiences. The swimming offer, for example, exceeds the minimum requirement. It helps pupils develop an important life skill. Also, pupils' safety is well considered. They learn how to ride a bike on the road and how best to navigate the internet. Well-planned educational visits, including to places of worship and a residential trip, broaden pupils' horizons. Also, the school sensibly arrange for pupils to use public transport. This prepares Year 6 pupils well for when they catch the school bus to travel to secondary school in the nearby towns.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the school's approach to assessment does not provide enough information about what pupils have learned and remembered. As a result, teachers cannot efficiently use this information to plug gaps in pupils' knowledge. The school should modify this approach, so that checks on pupils' learning are efficient and helpful to inform future teaching.

- The school is in the process of finetuning the additional support for pupils with SEND. Some of this support lacks a clear measure by which to assess progress. Leaders should provide staff with the training and time to put in place precise support for pupils with SEND that aligns closely to their needs and which can be monitored efficiently and effectively to maximise pupils' achievement.

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	117144
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10318584
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Clare Alcock
Headteacher	Nancy Adshead
Website	stpaulswalden.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 and 6 March 2020 under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a small school comprising four classes: a Reception class, a Year 1 and 2 class, a Year 3 and 4 class, and a Year 5 and 6 class.
- The headteacher begins a new headship at a local school in April 2024. The local authority has arranged for the headteachers from two local primary schools to lead the school in an interim capacity. This arrangement is pending the recruitment of a substantive headteacher, likely to take up the post in September 2024.
- There is after-school childcare for pupils attending the school. It is run by a separately registered and inspected childcare provider.
- There is a pre-school, St Paul's Walden Nursery, on the school site. It is a separately registered and inspected early years provider for children aged two to five.
- The school does not use 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.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the headteacher, special educational needs and disabilities coordinator, four governors and two representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in the early years, as well as examining the additional support plans that specify extra help or strategies for pupils with SEND.
- 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 also considered the responses to surveys. These included 39 responses to the pupil survey, 12 responses to the staff survey, and 36 responses with 24 free-text responses to Ofsted Parent View. An inspector also spoke to several parents at the start of a school day.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Stuart Pope

Ofsted Inspector

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