

Inspection of a good school: Edwinstree Church of England Middle School

Norfolk Road, Buntingford, Hertfordshire SG9 9AW

Inspection dates:

17 and 18 April 2024

Outcome

Edwinstree Church of England Middle School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils value the breadth of the Edwinstree curriculum and the diversity in their school community. The pupil-led dynamic diversity group (DDG) is active in promoting respectful relationships and celebrating individual differences. In the words of one of the school's aims, everyone is expected to bring out 'their own wonderful'.

Regular reading is encouraged. Pupils enjoy the interesting literature that they read with their teachers in lessons. Extra help means that pupils who have fallen behind with their reading catch up.

Pupils understand the boundaries of good behaviour. Typically, they behave well. The school's system of rewards and sanctions is clear. Ensuring that all staff are consistent in applying expectations is prioritised. If pupils misbehave, staff guide them to improve. While bullying is rare, pupils trust staff to resolve concerns. Pupils feel safe in school. They learn how to keep safe in the community.

Older pupils like having responsibilities, for example as school councillors, sports leaders and eco-ambassadors. After-school clubs are popular and well attended, including the rehearsals for the annual whole-school drama production. Pupils are well prepared to move on with confidence to the next stage of their education.

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

During a period of staffing turbulence, now settling, the school has ensured that pupils continue to experience a broad and ambitious curriculum. Subject plans identify the key knowledge that pupils need to know. They specify clearly the order in which pupils need to learn this knowledge. There are many opportunities for pupils to revisit previous content and apply it to new ideas. Staff adjust learning activities so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) can access the same curriculum as their peers. A few pupils need a more personalised curriculum. These plans are focused on getting pupils back into the full range of studies as soon as possible.

Pupils join the school in Year 5. Overall, they make good progress by the end of Year 8, so they are well prepared for upper school. Previous gaps in the progress of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND are closing. This is because of successful interventions and improving attendance.

Curriculum plans for a few subjects are still becoming established due to ongoing curriculum development and staffing changes. Teachers check pupils' learning regularly. However, they are not always precise enough in telling pupils exactly what they need to do to continue to improve their work. When this happens, some pupils do not make as much progress as they could.

Pupils are encouraged to read widely and often, in school and at home. The library offers a popular and quiet space in which to enjoy books. If pupils need extra help with their reading, they are supported to catch up, including through age-appropriate use of phonics.

While most pupils behave well, a few do not meet the school's high expectations. Behaviour improvement plans, where needed, make a positive difference, not only to pupils' behaviour but also to how well they learn.

Pupils' personal development is woven carefully through the curriculum. Pupils can take on a range of extra responsibilities. The DDG plays its part in championing tolerance and respect, for example sharing its understanding of neurodiversity with other pupils. Important themes inform assemblies and personal, social and health education (PSHE), such as themes linked to behaviour that falls below the school's expectations. In all subjects, close ties with the upper school ensure that pupils are ready for their move at the end of Year 8.

Staff are proud to be part of the school. They value the support of leaders, including governors, and know that leaders prioritise their well-being. While most parents are positive about the school's work, some feel that communication between the school and home is not strong enough. This is especially the case for some parents of pupils with SEND. When this happens, it causes frustration, because parents are unclear about decisions linked to their children's support.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staffing changes mean that some revised curriculum plans and curriculum developments are still embedding. As a result, teachers' checks on learning are not consistently precise enough in clarifying for pupils exactly what they need to do to continue to improve. The school should ensure that teachers are clear enough in

helping pupils to understand exactly what they need to do next, so that all pupils routinely achieve well across the curriculum.

- Communications between the school and home are not routinely as strong as they should be. This is especially the case for some parents of pupils with SEND. The shortfall leads to frustration because parents are unclear about the reasons underpinning important decisions, including those linked to pupils' support. The school should work closely with parents to address concerns, so that all parents feel that their views are heard and understand why decisions are taken.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 2018.

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	117554
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10323654
Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	9 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	477
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	John Boulter
Headteacher	Joanne Gant
Website	www.edwinstree.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	18 October 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has an informal partnership arrangement with three local schools. This is known as The Rib Valley Schools.
- Leaders work occasionally with two providers of alternative education to meet the needs of a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The most recent inspection of the school's denominational education and collective worship, under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, took place in June 2017. The next section 48 inspection is due within eight years of this date.

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. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors conducted deep dives in the following subjects: English, including reading, mathematics, French and design and technology. To complete each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons and spoke with teachers. They also spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work.
- A wider sample of curriculum plans were considered beyond the deep dives, including in science, geography and history.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors looked at safeguarding policies, the school's record of pre-employment checks on new staff and a sample of child protection files. They 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 lead inspector spoke with a group of governors, including the chair of governors. They also met with the school's safeguarding team. Inspectors spoke with a wider group of staff about safeguarding practices at the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and other leaders, including leaders with oversight of support for pupils with SEND, behaviour and attendance.
- Further discussions were held with staff with responsibility for PSHE provision and careers education.
- A range of documents were checked, including behaviour logs, attendance records, minutes of governors' meetings, school improvement plans and school policies.
- The lead inspector also spoke with the school improvement partner and a representative of the Diocese of St Albans.
- There were 145 responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, which were considered alongside 143 free-text responses from parents. Inspectors also considered the school's own surveys of parents' views, the 29 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils and 156 responses to the questionnaire for school staff.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Caroline Dawes

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