

Inspection of a good school: St Helen's Church of England Primary School

Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL4 8AN

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 June 2024

Outcome

St Helen's Church of England Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy to attend St Helen's. They are encouraged to do their best. Pupils show a high level of respect to each other and develop strong relationships with all staff. Pupils feel safe and know that staff will help them if they have any worries.

Pupils learn an ambitious curriculum. It helps them to achieve well. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Clear routines in the early years help children to develop positive behaviours towards their learning. Most pupils show these positive behaviours throughout the school. However, a minority of pupils do not always meet adults' high expectations.

Pupils engage enthusiastically with the broad range of activities that are on offer. Opportunities for pupils to organise and run their own clubs help to develop new skills and confidence while providing activities of interest to others. Clubs such as fencing, sign language and Braille help to develop pupils' wider talents and interests.

There is a strong community aspect to the school. Pupils take part in village events, such as the village day, singing at the village Christmas lights switch-on and attending celebrations at the local church.

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

The school has a broad and ambitious curriculum in place for all pupils, including those with SEND. Curriculum documents clearly set out the important information that pupils need to know and remember from the Reception Year through to Year 6.

Staff have strong subject knowledge because of the training that they receive. Curriculum resources additionally help staff to develop the confidence and expertise they need to teach effective lessons. Teachers present lessons well and use a range of activities to engage pupils in their learning. However, teachers' checks on how well pupils remember important information are inconsistent. Often, these checks are not used effectively to

adapt teaching to ensure pupils have the knowledge they need. When this happens, pupils move on to new content before they are ready. This means that some pupils' knowledge is not as secure as it should be.

The school prioritises reading. Children learn phonics from the start of the Reception Year. Phonics is taught with a high level of consistency across the school. As a result, staff quickly identify pupils who struggle to read. Well-trained staff provide effective support to help these pupils to keep up. Extra practice helps pupils who are secure in phonics to develop more confidence and fluency. Daily reading opportunities for pupils foster their love of reading. They talk enthusiastically about their favourite authors and books.

The school supports pupils with SEND very well. Clear plans outline the extra help that they need. Staff adapt their teaching and use appropriate resources to ensure that pupils can successfully access the same curriculum as their peers. In addition, those with more complex needs are supported by staff with a high level of expertise. This helps pupils with SEND to achieve well.

Children in the Reception Year follow established routines. Staff know the children well. This helps them identify where children have gaps in their learning. Carefully considered activities help to engage children and close the identified gaps. For example, a number of varied activities support the development of children's understanding of shape. Children are confident and make a good start to their education. They are ready for Year 1.

At social times, behaviour is calm. Pupils engage with the wide range of structured activities that are provided for them. In lessons, while most pupils behave very well, learning is occasionally disrupted by the behaviour of a small number of pupils. However, staff reminders are sufficient to enable these pupils to refocus on their learning.

The school has a well-considered programme to develop pupils more widely. Pupils learn and know how to keep themselves safe when online. Pupils are proud of the inclusive nature of the school. For example, all pupils can represent the school in sporting fixtures. Girls routinely play football alongside boys on the school grounds at social times. Roles of responsibility, such as being a member of the school council or sports captain, enable pupils to contribute to the school community. Elections to pupil leadership roles support pupils to learn about democracy.

Staff feel well supported. They value how school leaders support them with training and the actions taken to reduce their workload. Governors know the school well because of the regular checks and visits that they make.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not consistently check what pupils know during lessons and use this information to inform their teaching. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge when teachers move on to new content. They can struggle to make connections with learning that has come before. The school should ensure that staff consistently use assessment strategies to identify gaps in what pupils know and make adaptations to their teaching to make sure that pupils achieve well.

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 March 2015.

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	117462
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10336970
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	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Diana Batt
Headteacher	Kaye Healy
Website	www.sthelens.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 December 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not use any alternative providers.

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 their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and languages. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work.
- The inspector also reviewed samples of work in science, design and technology, geography and history.
- 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 scrutinised a wide range of documents and observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons.
- Discussions were held with the school around its provision for early years, pupils' personal development, behaviour and provision for pupils with SEND.
- The inspector met with representatives of the governing body and held a telephone conversation with a representative from the diocese and the school improvement partner.
- The inspector considered 93 responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey, including 59 free-text comments.

Inspection team

Wayne Jarvis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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