

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Helen's Church of England Primary School, Cliffe

Church Street, Cliffe, Rochester, Kent ME3 7PU

Inspection dates: 15 and 16 October 2024

Outcome

St Helen's Church of England Primary School, Cliffe has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love school and are passionate ambassadors of it. The school gives its pupils a strong voice in school life and teaches them how to use it well. For example, pupils aspire to join the pupil parliament or to roles like eco-warrior or librarian. Pupils thrive personally, socially and emotionally. Pupils live out the school values by being kind, caring and inclusive with one another. They behave well and their manners are impeccable.

The school seeks the best for all pupils. Through these high expectations, pupils develop a keen interest in the world around them. Most gain a rich range of knowledge and skills. They take joy and pride in making links in their learning, digging deep into their memories to retrieve useful things they have sometimes learned years before.

Pupils throw themselves with equal enthusiasm into the school's wide-ranging opportunities. The school nurtures and celebrates diverse talents from horse-riding and other sports to learning the flute or violin. It checks carefully that all pupils benefit from optional activities, guiding and encouraging those who would benefit most. Unfortunately, for some, this undoubted enjoyment in school is not always reflected in how often they attend, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

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

During recent changes in leadership, the school has remained focused on ensuring that pupils achieve well. Staff are unanimously proud to work at the school. They know that expectations of them are high and that the school supports them to rise to the challenge. This in turn leads to pupils who are rightly proud of the high-quality work they produce.

They speak enthusiastically and knowledgeably about the topics they have studied. They take genuine delight in their growing knowledge of scientific concepts, different historical periods and global geography. Pupils master a range of technical vocabulary in different subjects. This rich knowledge stands them in good stead for the next stage of education.

The carefully crafted curriculum supports this effective learning well. The school ensures that staff are trained and supported well. Teachers methodically explain and demonstrate new learning points clearly. They check that pupils understand the lesson content. However, these checks do not include all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils, consistently well enough. Teachers are then unaware that some pupils have not grasped what they need to know at that moment in time. These pupils risk being left with errors or gaps in their learning.

In other ways, the school supports pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities well. Adults provide or adapt a wide range of resources to meet pupils' diverse needs. This sits alongside taking account of the views of pupils, other professionals, parents and carers in allocating appropriate support.

Pupils cherish reading. The school champions its importance and instils a genuine passion for this pastime. At the start of this journey, phonics teaching is typically efficient and effective. The school establishes crucial learning routines right from the start of Reception. However, the timeliness and quality of support for pupils who fall behind is not as tight as it could be. Their reading books do not match their current capabilities consistently well enough.

The school lays similarly strong foundations in mathematics from early years onwards. It engineers positive attitudes to mathematics by carefully giving younger children everything they need to be secure in these first steps. Teachers set tasks that make it easy to check pupils' understanding. Adults seize opportunities to intervene and clarify important points. Pupils acquire the resilience to persevere and try again if they make a mistake.

The promotion of pupils' wider development sits alongside academic achievement at the heart of the school's aspiration for pupils. Through this work, the school places a strong emphasis on reducing disadvantage wherever it can. As well as harnessing local opportunities, the school actively seeks out ways to broaden pupils' horizons to the world beyond. These include trips to local museums, to vast concert arenas as well as different places of worship.

Pupils are a credit to the school through their learning, conduct and behaviour. Breaktimes are happy, social occasions. Pupils are proud to take their part in the smooth running of the day. Trained pupil playleaders flourish while leading groups in organised games, benefiting all involved. The popular 'Oasis' club supports pupils who need it to have a positive social experience through a range of more structured activities in a calmer environment.

Current attendance is much more positive than it has been in the past, but still notably lower for disadvantaged pupils. The school has started to take further steps to analyse and tackle the underlying issues, but there is more to do.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Support for pupils who have fallen behind in learning to read is not as rigorous or timely as it could be. This means that pupils who need to are not afforded the best possible opportunities to catch up as quickly as they might. The school should increase the urgency of this intervention and ensure that all staff who support struggling readers are sufficiently expert. It should also make sure that the books pupils read more closely match the sounds they know and need to practise.
- Teachers are not consistently adept at checking that all pupils' understanding is secure. This leaves some pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged, with misconceptions or gaps in their learning that could be more promptly addressed. The school should ensure that teachers routinely and effectively check that all pupils have secured the necessary learning to successfully move on and adapt their approach accordingly.
- Overall, disadvantaged pupils miss too much school. This means it is difficult for them to keep up with the demands of the school's curriculum and, if they fall behind, makes it much harder for them to catch up. The school should continue to build on the work it has recently started to tighten the strategy around improving attendance to ensure all pupils benefit from all of the educational and social experiences on offer.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 for overall effectiveness in November 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	118641
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10341503
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	193
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Ian Chappell
Headteacher	Lenny Williams (Interim Executive Headteacher)
Website	www.sthelens.medway.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 June 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a Church of England primary school within the Diocese of Rochester. The school's religious character was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 in May 2017. The school is due its next inspection of this type during the current academic year.
- The previous headteacher retired at the end of the 2023/24 academic year. The school is currently being led by an interim executive headteacher who oversees this and another school.
- The school runs its own breakfast club.
- The school is currently making use of one registered alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 held extensive discussions throughout the inspection with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. He also met other leaders and staff.
- The inspector met with the chair of governors and three other governors. He also met with a representative of the local authority and spoke with the director of education for the Diocese of Rochester on the telephone.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- 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 considered the views expressed in the online inspection surveys returned by pupils and staff. The inspector also took account of the responses submitted to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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