

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Combe Down CofE Primary School

Church Road, Combe Down, Bath, Somerset BA2 5JQ

Inspection dates:

19 and 20 November 2024

Outcome

Combe Down CofE Primary School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The co-headteachers of this school are Jo Bird and Jane Gascoigne. This school is part of Palladian Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Donna Tandy, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Ruth Balch.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Combe Down Primary have extremely positive attitudes to learning and are keen to do well. This starts in the early years where children's engagement and enthusiasm are tangible. The school has high expectations for all pupils to learn well, and they do.

Pupils are rightly proud of the school. There is a strong sense of community. The school has a vibrant and caring culture. Staff know pupils well. There are warm relationships between pupils and staff. Pupils know that there are adults to talk to if they have a worry. This helps them to feel safe.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They show great care and consideration to their peers and adults. Pupils are respectful and polite. They recognise the importance of treating others fairly. Disruptions to learning are rare. The school values of, 'be ready, be respectful, be safe' help pupils to understand how to behave.

Opportunities for learning extend beyond the academic. Pupils learn about different backgrounds, faiths and cultures, as well as discrimination. They understand and value difference.

Pupils enjoy the opportunity to take on leadership roles, for example as house captains, worship ambassadors and play leaders. Older pupils support younger pupils through the school's buddy system. This helps them to learn about responsibility.

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

The school is highly ambitious and has a relentless drive to provide the very best for all pupils.

There is a sharp focus on reading. Children begin learning phonics as soon as they start school in Reception. Staff support pupils well. Most pupils read books that match the sounds that they know. This helps them to read with increasing fluency and confidence. This is particularly evident as pupils progress through the school. Pupils who fall behind receive the help they need to catch up quickly.

There is a clear focus on handwriting. Children in Reception quickly learn the correct pencil grip and letter formation. The curriculum sets out the expectations for handwriting. However, this is not consistently followed. Some pupils do not secure the fundamentals in handwriting.

There is a strong emphasis on oracy. This is evident across all subjects and in all year groups. From the start of Reception, children learn to articulate their thinking. Teachers use strategies such as sentence stems to help children to express their ideas and to explain their thinking. As pupils progress through the school, they build on and challenge others' ideas. Pupils do this in a respectful and considerate way. They confidently contribute their ideas and justify their opinions.

The school has worked with the trust to develop and strengthen the wider curriculum. Some subjects are more securely embedded than others. For example, the curriculums for history and religious education set out the knowledge for pupils to learn and the order in which to learn it. This helps pupils to develop a secure understanding. As a result, pupils in Year 6 talk confidently about recent learning about Vikings. They understand the chronology of different periods in history. Staff have the training and support they need to deliver the curriculum well. Teachers explain concepts clearly. There are regular and deliberate opportunities for pupils to revisit prior learning. This helps pupils to understand new content and to remember their learning in the long-term. However, in a few subjects, pupils' understanding is less secure. This is because the sequence of learning is not as clearly defined. In those subjects, systems for checking what pupils know and remember are in their early stages of development.

There is an inclusive culture in the school. Staff swiftly identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They put appropriate support into place. There has been a distinct focus on teaching strategies to support pupils' learning.

There is an exceptionally strong offer to support pupils' broader development. The trust's 'Palladian Promise' and the school's personal development programme provide a range of experiences. For example, during their time at school all pupils learn an adaptive sport such as wheelchair basketball. This helps pupils to learn about inclusion and the importance of celebrating difference.

Leaders are tenacious in the actions they take to improve attendance. The school is explicit about the importance of being in school regularly and on time. It works closely with families to provide support. This has contributed to rising attendance.

Governors and trustees have an accurate picture of the school through robust systems for quality assurance. They check that the school's actions are having a positive impact. Staff and parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Staff appreciate the professional development opportunities available to them. These help them to further improve their practice.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school is continuing to develop the wider curriculum. In a few subjects, the curriculum does not yet define how learning is broken down to ensure that it is progressive and well sequenced. Assessment is in its early stages of development in those subjects. The trust should ensure that the curriculum is developed well in all subjects, including the use of assessment, to support pupils in knowing more and remembering more.
- The handwriting curriculum is not consistently implemented. Some younger pupils do not secure the fundamentals of handwriting. The trust should ensure that the handwriting curriculum is consistently implemented to provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop and practise their handwriting.

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 predecessor school, Combe Down CofE Primary School, to be good for overall effectiveness in September 2013.

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	142943
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset Council
Inspection number	10344725
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	410
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ruth Balch
CEO of the trust	Donna Tandy
Headteacher	Jo Bird (co-headteacher), Jane Gascoigne (co-headteacher)
Website	www.combedown.com
Date of previous inspection	13 March 2019

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Palladian Academy Trust.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Bath and Wells.
- The school had its last denominational education inspection under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 in March 2023. The next section 48 inspection will take place within five school years of that date.

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 have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspector spoke with the co-head teachers, curriculum leaders and a group of teachers.
- The inspector held meetings with the trust CEO, a group of trustees including the chair of the trust board, a representative from the diocese and members of the school's local governing committee.
- 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.

Inspection team

Nicky McMahon, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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