Inspection of Sissinghurst Voluntary Aided Church of England Primary School

Common Road, Sissinghurst, Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2BH

Inspection dates:	29 and 30 April 2025
The quality of education	**Good**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Outstanding**
Early years provision	**Outstanding**
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where each member of its community believes firmly in 'letting your light shine'. Whether in terms of academic achievement, demonstrating the leadership qualities fostered in them by staff, or in more unique opportunities to develop their talents and interests, pupils achieve well here. For example, some pupils are helping to build a pirate ship in the school playground, while learning to use tools safely. Parents and carers describe how their children 'run into school happily every morning' because of the engaging activities and relationships they will find here.

Leaders have transformed this school, rapidly tackling the issues identified at the last inspection. Parents note the way that their children 'thrive' in the care of staff who are committed to supporting their children. A well-taught curriculum supports pupils in developing an increasing body of knowledge.

Pupils behave especially well and take responsibility for making their school community one that is based on kindness. For example, constructive activities at playtimes see older pupils taking the lead to support their younger peers. Well-considered activities, such as playing with the parachute, working in the 'construction area' and playing games with younger pupils, engage them.

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

Leaders have readily addressed the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. A well-planned and carefully sequenced curriculum is now in place across subjects. This is planned from the early years upwards, where children develop effective foundations and build upon them as they move up through the school.

Governors hold leaders to account well. They make careful checks to ensure that improvements to the school have the impact they need to.

The school is outward looking. It has developed a professional network with a local trust to support its ongoing improvements. This includes for subject leaders who have been empowered to train and support staff in delivering their subjects effectively. As a result of this training, staff have strong subject expertise, which they use to explore learning effectively.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported in lessons. Staff understand their needs well and adapt their input to ensure pupils achieve well.

In some areas of the curriculum, pupils are supported to remember their learning well over time. For example, regular reminders of previous learning help pupils to see how this connects and builds into what they are learning now. However, this is not the case across some areas of the wider curriculum where, while pupils can talk with confidence about their current work, they are less able to recall what they have learned before.

Staff, parents and pupils are confident about their school. They know the direction of travel. Staff feel well supported by leaders, both in terms of workload and well-being but also professionally in developing the skills they need to do their jobs well.

The early years provides an exceptionally positive start to the school for children. Children have positive relationships with the adults in this space and thrive in their care. Well-considered learning activities mean they rapidly learn the knowledge and skills they need to progress on to Year 1 and beyond.

The wider development of pupils is an increasing strength of the school. Pupils take readily to the opportunities they have to lead, such as being members of the school council, house captains, 'planet defenders' and event planners. These pupils talk with confidence about the difference they make, and plan to make, to their school community. For example, pupil leaders have plans to further develop the peace garden in the school. Pupils grow their independence in the outdoor woodland environment, where they learn how to make dens and to whittle with tools safely.

Reading is a central priority in this school, visually represented by the reading tree that sits at its heart. Here, pupils read to adults and to each other, selecting a range of interesting texts. Classrooms are full of books that interest pupils. Phonics is taught well. Staff use their expertise to support children to sound out and blend words together. For those who need additional support, well-placed interventions help them to read with increasing accuracy and confidence.

Pupils behave especially well in this school. Classrooms are purposeful places of learning, with pupils keen to engage by responding to questions and thinking hard about their learning. They take rightful pride in the work they produce and are confident to explain what they have learned to visitors. Pupils treat one another well, with politeness and kindness. Pupils are supported to attend school well and levels of absence have now decreased sharply. However, some of the most vulnerable pupils in the school still do not attend well enough. Leaders recognise this as their ongoing area of focus.

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 foundation subjects, pupils are not consistently supported to retain their knowledge over time. This means that, while pupils can talk securely about their current learning, they are not as well equipped to remember what has come before or how this connects to what they are learning now. The school needs to ensure that pupils are given opportunities to recap, revisit and recall their learning to support them in being able to connect their learning and retain this in the longer term.

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	118717
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10379807
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	176
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Juan Garzon
Headteacher	Sarah Holman
Website	www.sissinghurst.kent.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	28 February and 1 March 2023, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There have been a number of changes to the leadership of the school since the last inspection, including the headteacher and the chair of governors.
- The school currently uses one unregistered alternative provision.
- The school is part of the Diocese of Canterbury. The most recent section 48 inspection, for schools of a religious character, took place in June 2018.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspection team held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, teachers and pupils. The lead inspector met with the members of the governing body, including the chair. The lead inspector also held a meeting with a representative from the local authority and a telephone call with a representative from the Diocese.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, history and art. 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.
- 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.
- The inspection team took account of a range of other information, including the school's development plans, school policies and governing body minutes.
- The team spoke with pupils about their experience of the school. They took account of parent and carer and staff views through conversations and responses to Ofsted's surveys.

Inspection team

Marian Feeley, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Catherine Hylands	Ofsted Inspector

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