

Inspection of a good school: St John's Church of England Primary School, Sevenoaks

Bayham Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 3XD

Inspection dates:

9 and 10 February 2022

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Everyone is proud to be a part of St John's. Pupils, staff, parents and governors all recognise the warm relationships that exist between everyone. Adults show care and love to every child. Leaders are committed to living out the school's Christian ethos of 'all different, all equal: all learning together in God's world'.

Pupils behave well and are very happy. They like that it is a small school because they can get to know everyone. Pupils say that bullying hardly ever happens. In fact, they find it hard to recall any unkindness. Pupils feel safe and protected.

The wider experiences that leaders provide for pupils are second to none. Pupils have stepped onto Centre Court at Wimbledon, watched The Royal Ballet and visited Barcelona to enrich the Spanish curriculum. Pupils can join popular clubs in boxing, judo, choir and sewing, to name but a few.

Beyond this enrichment, pupils are not provided the same strengths in the academic curriculum. The approach to teaching pupils to read is not working well. Pupils are not learning extensive knowledge in some subjects. The new headteacher recognised the school had lost its way. Since her arrival, she is determined to put this right.

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

Outside of English and mathematics, leaders and staff have been reviewing the school's curriculum to ensure it is ambitious and knowledge rich. The pandemic has continued to hamper leaders' plans. Not all subjects outline the detailed knowledge of what is taught and when. This then hinders how teachers deliver the curriculum.

When planning tasks, teachers can be misguided by thinking that pupils will lose interest if they are not actively discovering things. Beyond pupils' enjoyment, their learning becomes shallow as they are not acquiring the knowledge they need. Often, pupils are asked to think like subject 'experts' without first learning the essential building blocks of knowledge.

In mathematics, the well-informed subject leader has trained staff in how to deliver the content in a highly structured way to help pupils gain a deeper understanding of concepts. Staff use real objects and mathematical apparatus well to help pupils secure their understanding. This is particularly effective for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers use ongoing assessments to check what pupils can remember. They review previous learning at the start of each lesson. All of this leads to pupils leaving Year 6 as confident mathematicians.

Older pupils read avidly. They select challenging books to widen their knowledge and vocabulary. However, pupils learning to read are not well supported. Staff are not expertly trained in phonics. Consequently, they go about creating activities that enthuse pupils, yet miss the point of teaching a child to read. Furthermore, the additional sessions to catch up the weakest readers are not helping either. Staff are focusing on the wrong strategies, which inadvertently mean these pupils fall further behind in reading. Pupils are also not reading books that closely match the sounds they know. Wisely, leaders have recently purchased a new complete phonics programme but have not yet had time to start using it.

In lessons, pupils are keen to learn. While the oldest pupils act as positive role models, leaders recognise that the pandemic has affected pupils in younger year groups. Some have found it challenging to sit sensibly and focus for periods of time. There are also inconsistencies in how adults follow the behaviour policy. Sometimes, adults do not spot pupils who are not doing as they should in class. As a result, these pupils are not learning as well as they could.

For pupils with SEND, leaders work smartly to identify additional needs. They make effective use of assessment to explore possible barriers. In class, tasks are adapted appropriately to help pupils with SEND access the same learning as everyone else.

End-of-key-stage results in 2019 and previous years were high. This led to governors believing that everything must be fine. Complacency crept in and governors have taken their eye off the ball. They do not rigorously hold leaders to account for the curriculum that pupils learn. In meetings, they do not ensure they ask probing questions. Often, they take leaders' word at face value.

Staff feel leaders listen and care. They love working here and feel that leaders do what they can to ease workload. Equally, parents are very positive, with everyone surveyed recommending this school.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspector agreed that the quality of education in the foundation subjects and leadership and management may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have trained staff to know what to do if they have a concern about a child. They understand that telling the headteacher straight away is of utmost importance. Safeguarding records are stored efficiently so that leaders have important information at their fingertips. The safeguarding team meets regularly to discuss pupils and families.

The curriculum teaches pupils how to stay safe online and to know appropriate boundaries in friendships. During the inspection, the school's safer recruitment checks lacked rigour in places. Leaders and governors are aware of this and are putting the right staff training in place.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's current approach to teaching phonics is not working effectively. Consequently, the weakest readers are not catching up quickly enough. Leaders need to ensure that every adult is fully trained to deliver all aspects of the new systematic, synthetic phonics programme with fidelity. Leaders should plan carefully how to implement the new programme at the earliest opportunity.
- In some foundation subjects, knowledge is not coherently sequenced from early years to Year 6. As a result, teachers are unclear what the intended knowledge is and how this builds successfully on what has been learned previously. Leaders should continue with their work on planning the cumulative steps of knowledge in all year groups for each subject.
- Some teachers' pedagogical knowledge is weak. This means that they sometimes select activities that do not help pupils to learn knowledge. This is particularly the case for teachers of younger pupils. Leaders need to provide high-quality professional development to support all teachers to deliver the school's ambitious curriculum.
- Not all staff uphold the high expectations of the behaviour policy. This then results in some pupils not learning well. Leaders need to ensure that all staff apply consistent routines and follow the school's rules for how pupils must behave.
- Governors do not rigorously hold leaders to account for the quality of education. Furthermore, governors need to establish clear checks and balances to help them have a realistic view of the school's performance. Governors require further training to help them carry out their roles and responsibilities successfully.

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 a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2012.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	118606
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10200106
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	206
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Fr. Robin Jones
Headteacher	Therese Pullan
Website	www.stjohnssevenoaks.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 September 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher joined the school in September 2021.
- As a Church of England school, St John's is part of the Diocese of Rochester. Its most recent section 48 inspection was in April 2017.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with senior leaders, staff and pupils. He also met with the committee chairs of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and a school improvement officer from the local authority, and had a telephone conversation with a representative from the diocese.
- The inspector carried out deep dives into these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. To do this, he discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited

lessons, had discussions with staff, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at pupils' work.

- Pupils were observed reading to a familiar adult by the inspector.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector spoke with staff and pupils. He met with the designated safeguarding lead to examine records and actions. This included sampling a range of safeguarding documentation. He reviewed checks on the safer recruitment of staff and training records.
- Pupils from different year groups were met with to talk about their learning and experiences at school.
- The views of staff, parents and pupils were gathered through discussions and Ofsted's online surveys.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school improvement plan, self-evaluation form, policies, curriculum documents, published information about pupils' performance and minutes of governance meetings.

Inspection team

James Broadbridge, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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