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

Ivel Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1AX

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 December 2022

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel happy and well cared for in this inclusive school. They describe it as 'amazing' and 'friendly'. Pupils work hard and get along well together. This supports the school's vision of 'building foundations for the future' successfully.

Pupils talk positively about their learning. They try their best to fulfil the high expectations of their teachers. As one pupil said: 'You need to work hard to get things stuck in your brain.'

Pupils are polite and well mannered. They follow school routines and conduct themselves well around the school. They know how to behave. They are adamant that bullying is rare in their school. If they have concerns, they share these through 'worry monsters' placed in every class. Pupils believe that adults would act quickly to sort out any problems.

Pupils know about the school's values. They reflect on these during weekly assemblies. Pupils understand the importance of these values, such as 'trust' and 'thankfulness'. They help to build pupils' sense of community through working together.

Many parents and carers are positive about the school. They speak highly of the nurturing relationships staff have with their children. As one parent commented: 'This school is an absolute gem.'

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

Leaders have designed a broad and ambitious curriculum. Their subject plans identify the key knowledge pupils need to know from the early years to the end points in Year 6. Leaders have thought carefully about the order in which pupils learn things. This is helping pupils to build new knowledge based on their prior learning. Some curriculum plans have been in place for some time. In these subjects, pupils develop their understanding and recall their learning well. In a few subjects, plans are newer. Teachers

do not fully understand what they need to teach. This means that some pupils still have gaps in their knowledge as the curriculum is not established.

Subject leaders play an active part in checking the effectiveness of their areas of responsibility. They use their subject expertise to review, adjust and strengthen the curriculum. Some subject leaders are new to their role. They have not had enough opportunities to make full checks of their subjects. They do not have precise information about how well pupils are learning.

Teachers make use of strong subject knowledge to check pupils' understanding. They make sure that pupils think carefully about what they have learned before. Teachers use this information effectively to move pupils forward in their learning. For example, in mathematics, pupils used their knowledge of shapes to understand their properties.

The teaching of reading has a high priority in the school. Children learn phonics as soon as they start in the early years. They quickly begin to develop their fluency in reading. Books are well matched to the sounds pupils are learning. Pupils use their phonic knowledge when reading unfamiliar words. Staff quickly identify where pupils have gaps in their phonic knowledge. Adults provide extra support to help these pupils to catch up with their reading.

Leaders know the pupils well. They are quick to identify where pupils need additional help. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have personalised plans for their learning. This also includes those pupils who attend the additional resource base. Teachers make purposeful adaptations in lessons to support pupils with SEND to learn well.

Leaders provide pupils with a range of experiences to promote development of their character. Different roles encourage pupils to be active leaders and take responsibility for themselves and others. Pupils develop their interests through lunchtime and after-school clubs. They develop an age-appropriate understanding of respectful, healthy relationships. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. Pupils enjoy learning. They are attentive in class and keen to learn. Pupils are well prepared for their next stages of education.

The school is well led and managed. Leaders' shared vision supports a team approach. Staff enjoy working at the school. They feel well supported by leaders who are approachable and considerate of their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff receive regular training and updates to help them remain vigilant to any signs of concern. Staff know how to report any worries, no matter how small. Leaders are quick to act on any concerns brought to their attention. They ensure that vulnerable pupils receive the support they need.

Leaders complete appropriate checks before staff and volunteers begin to work with children at the school. Governors regularly check that records of recruitment are up to date.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, curriculum plans are in the early stages of implementation. Some teachers do not have precise knowledge of what they must teach. This means that some pupils have gaps in their knowledge. Leaders should ensure that all subjects are consistently implemented so that pupils achieve well across the curriculum.
- Some subject leaders who are new to their roles have not fully evaluated the impact of their planned curriculum. This means that they are unsure how well their plans are working, or how well pupils remember important information over time. Leaders should ensure that they check and evaluate the effectiveness of the whole curriculum. They should provide staff with any further training and support to implement leaders' intentions effectively across all subjects.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2017.

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' 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	109604
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10211243
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	218
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Diane Osborne
Headteacher	Anita Whitehurst (Executive Headteacher)
Website	www.stswithunssandy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 to 20 January 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- At the time of the previous inspection, the school was deemed a lower school. In September 2017, the school took on older year groups to become a primary school. At the time of this inspection, there were pupils in every year group that the school is registered for.
- The school is responsible for managing an additional resource base that admits pupils with communication difficulties and autism spectrum disorder needs.
- The school has an informal partnership with another local primary school. They share an executive headteacher.
- The school has a Christian religious character. The school's most recent section 48 inspection took place in June 2017. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight years.
- The school makes use of three alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspector discussed any continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.

- The inspector met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, curriculum leaders and members of staff. The inspector also met with members of the governing body, including the chair. The inspector held a phone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and physical education. For each of these subjects, the inspector held discussions with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke with staff and pupils and looked at pupils' work. The inspector also considered pupils' learning in some other subjects.
- The inspector considered safeguarding documentation, including the school's single central record of employment checks. The inspector also scrutinised school documentation, including the school development plan and the school's self-evaluation.
- The inspector considered 40 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including 40 free-text comments. He also reviewed 18 responses to the staff survey as well as 39 responses to the online pupil survey. The inspector spoke to pupils about their experiences of school.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector

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