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

Western Avenue, Ashford, Kent TN23 1ND

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 April 2025

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at this wonderfully warm and welcoming school. They embody the school vision to 'shine as lights in the world'. From the early years, children learn how to act according to the school's values, including respect, forgiveness and compassion. The school builds warm and supportive relationships with pupils and their families. Pupils know that there is someone they can talk to if they are worried about anything. As a result, they feel happy and safe at school. One parent reflected the views of many when they described the school environment as 'enriching and joyful'.

The school has high expectations for pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Children in the early years settle quickly, because of the care and support that they receive. The school develops pupils' knowledge and confidence through a broad and ambitious curriculum. Most pupils achieve well in their learning. This is reflected in published outcomes. The school is aware of the need to further deepen and check pupils' understanding of what they learn.

Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain and develop a strong understanding of fundamental British values. They celebrate the diversity of the school in 'culture week'. The school also runs 'careers week', where pupils learn about future career pathways. The school provides pupils with many opportunities to take on positions of leadership or responsibility. Pupils can join the school's post office team or become sports captains, reading ambassadors or buddies for younger children. Pupils appreciate the new outdoor play activities at lunchtime.

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

The school has developed a rich and varied curriculum. From the early years, it has identified the ambitious knowledge that pupils should learn. For example, in art, pupils in Year 6 learn about artistic movements including impressionism, expressionism and fauvism. In history, pupils in Year 4 learn about the importance of social hierarchy in ancient civilisations. In geography, pupils in Year 5 learn about different land uses, including viticulture and floriculture.

The school places a high priority on early reading. Rigorous and effective training ensures that staff have strong knowledge of how to teach reading well. The school puts in place highly effective support for pupils who fall behind. Regular checks ensure that pupils read books that are well matched to their phonics knowledge. As a result, pupils become fluent and confident readers. This robust approach to pupils' reading development continues throughout the school.

In the early years, the curriculum provides children with purposeful hands-on learning experiences. These experiences enable them to develop their knowledge in different areas of learning, from counting and reading, to drawing, painting and learning about nature. This lays a solid foundation for future learning. The number of pupils identified as having SEND across the school is increasing. Staff receive regular training and expert guidance to identify, understand and meet pupils' needs. They use this knowledge to provide effective support, ensuring that pupils can access learning successfully. Those with more complex needs benefit from targeted support from skilled staff.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge and expertise. They promote pupils' curiosity with interesting content and experiences that extend pupils' learning. For example, pupils in Year 3 take part in a Stone Age workshop. Pupils in Year 4, when learning about the properties of rivers, take part in a river building experience day. However, pupils cannot recall the key information and vocabulary from previous lessons consistently. In addition, sometimes teachers do not check pupils' understanding as systematically as they should. As a result, pupils can have gaps in their learning and are not able to integrate new knowledge into existing ideas.

Pupils attending school regularly is a key focus. The school's proactive approach includes regular checks and effective communication with parents. As a result, pupils attend very well. Behaviour and conduct are managed successfully. Pupils understand and follow school routines, and any incidents are addressed promptly by staff. Pupils' achievements are recognised and celebrated in the weekly 'time to shine' assemblies.

The school promotes pupils' wider development effectively. There is a well-designed and age-appropriate personal, social and health education programme. Staff teach pupils about respecting other people's faiths, cultures and ways of life. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and maintain healthy relationships. The many sports fixtures and extra-curricular activities further build pupils' teamwork skills and resilience. Pupils appreciate the clubs they can choose to attend, such as football, ocarina, book club and choir.

A strong sense of unified purpose is evident through each level of leadership and staff. School leaders and governors have set a clear, ambitious vision which ensures that the school is working in the best interests of all pupils. Staff's well-being is central to leaders' concerns. Staff appreciate the support that the school offers, including a wide range of professional development opportunities. One staff member summed up the views of many when they said, 'I feel well supported and cared for at St Mary's'.

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 does not ensure that pupils are provided with opportunities to recall and apply key knowledge consistently. As a result, pupils are sometimes unable to retain knowledge as well as they should and apply it to future learning. The school should ensure that pupils are supported to remember and recall their learning consistently, so that they can build their knowledge more effectively over time.
- On occasion, the school does not check pupils' understanding carefully enough. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their learning and are not fully ready to learn new content. The school should ensure that staff check pupils' learning systematically and respond to any gaps or misconceptions swiftly, so that pupils achieve equally well in all subjects.

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 June 2016.

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	118738
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10379808
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	417
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Elizabeth Worthen
Headteacher	Nicola Hirst
Website	www.st-marys-ashford.kent.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	28 and 29 January 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a Church of England school in the Diocese of Canterbury. It was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 in April 2018. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years.
- The school operates a breakfast club on site.
- The school does not make use of any 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.
- During the inspection, the inspector met with the headteacher, members of the school senior leadership team, a selection of subject leaders, teachers and support staff.

- The inspector met with those responsible for governance, including the chair of governors. The inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority and a representative from the diocese.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning, looked at samples of pupils' work and met with some staff.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documents, including those related to pupils' wider development, behaviour and attendance. The inspector also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around school and during breaktime.
- 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 of parents submitted via Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. The inspector reviewed the responses to Ofsted's surveys for school staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Christian Hicks, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector

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