

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

Hall Lane, Willington, Crook, County Durham, DL15 0QH

Inspection dates:

27 and 28 September 2022

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders have successfully established a family ethos across the school's community. Staff, pupils and parents are proud of the school. One parent told the inspector, 'The school goes above and beyond on a regular basis.' This echoes the views of many parents. Staff share leaders' vision of providing a 'curriculum for life', which supports lifelong learning across the community.

Pupils are happy and feel safe in this nurturing school. Pupils adore Chase, the school's well-being dog. Pupils' behaviour is delightful. They are caring to one another and treat each other with respect. When children start in the early years, they quickly learn the staff's expectations and routines.

The atmosphere throughout school is calm. Pupils move around the building sensibly. They behave well in lessons, concentrating on their learning. In the playground, pupils are active and supportive. Bullying is extremely rare. Pupils are confident that, should bullying occur, adults will deal with it swiftly.

Leaders have an accurate view of the school's priorities. They recognise that the teaching of phonics is inconsistent. Pupils lack fluency and confidence in reading. Leaders accept that some areas of the curriculum lack sequence and precision. This makes it difficult for pupils to remember their learning over time.

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

Leaders provide pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum. However, leaders recognise that the wider curriculum design is not as detailed as it needs to be. In some curriculum areas, subject leaders have not identified the precise knowledge that they want pupils to

learn. At times, leaders have not carefully considered how learning will build progressively from the early years through to the end of key stage 2.

Leaders have prioritised the teaching of reading. They have recently introduced a revised early reading programme. This is in the early stage of development. Some teachers lack the expertise they need to deliver phonics teaching well. At times, the books that pupils read are not accurately matched to the sounds they know. This slows the rate at which pupils become fluent and confident readers.

Leaders have fostered a love of reading. They have carefully selected the books they want to share with pupils in each class. This includes books to help promote equality and diversity. Teachers read to pupils every day. Pupils' love of books is a strength of the school.

Pupils have a very positive attitude to mathematics. Most pupils have a strong grasp of calculations, including times tables. Pupils learn how to reason and solve mathematical problems well. However, pupils have less confidence in other areas of mathematics. The structure of the mathematics curriculum is not well sequenced. Leaders have not carefully considered the order in which pupils will be taught new mathematical concepts, such as measure. There are long periods of time before pupils have the opportunity to revisit their prior learning. This affects pupils' progress as they often fail to remember what they have learned.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified quickly. Support plans clearly outline the help that pupils with SEND need to access the curriculum. Staff skilfully use these plans. In class, adults provide effective support and encouragement. As a result, pupils with SEND achieve well.

Children in Nursery and Reception settle into school quickly. Relationships between adults and children are positive and caring. Knowledgeable adults model language well. They help children to develop a love of learning. Children enjoy listening to stories and rhymes. However, some of the weaknesses in the early reading curriculum mean that a few children begin to develop gaps in their early reading knowledge.

Leaders place great importance on pupils' personal development. Work to enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is of a high quality. The curriculum broadens pupils' understanding of the world beyond their community. Pupils benefit from faith leaders visiting the school to teach them about different religions and cultures. Pupils have an excellent understanding of fundamental British values, such as respect and tolerance. They live out these values in their daily lives. Pupils display mature attitudes and are resilient. There are many visits to school by people who work in a wide range of jobs to promote pupils' aspirations. Leaders ensure that pupils know how to be healthy, in terms of diet and physical and emotional health.

Governors care for the pupils and staff. They are mindful of staff well-being. Staff feel proud to work at the school. They talk of a strong morale. Staff speak highly of the support they have received from school leaders. They appreciate leaders' consideration for their well-being and workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils' safety is at the centre of the school's culture. School leaders ensure that all staff receive regular training updates. Staff are vigilant and follow school procedures for reporting concerns. Leaders follow up concerns in a timely and effective manner. As a result, vulnerable pupils are identified quickly and families receive the help they need. Leaders work well with external agencies.

The designated safeguarding leaders have created a thorough system to monitor and record all safeguarding concerns. Leaders' record-keeping is comprehensive and well organised. Appropriate recruitment checks are undertaken to ensure all adults are safe to work in school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The teaching of phonics is variable and lacks consistency. Some staff do not have the level of expertise needed to teach phonics well. The books that some pupils read do not closely match to the sounds that they know. As a result, some pupils lack fluency and confidence in reading. Leaders should ensure that all staff receive high-quality phonics training, so that they have the skills to implement the programme with consistency.
- The mathematics curriculum lacks sequence in some areas of learning. As a result, pupils do not consistently remember some important curriculum content. Leaders should adapt the curriculum to ensure time is provided for pupils to revisit and embed key mathematical concepts, so that they can build upon these in later learning.
- In some foundation subjects, curriculum plans are not as precise as they should be. Leaders have not specified the most important knowledge, skills and vocabulary pupils should learn. As a result, teachers are unclear about exactly what pupils need to learn and by when. Leaders should ensure that they identify the most important substantive and disciplinary knowledge that pupils should learn to be prepared for the next stage in learning.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in June 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](#)' 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	114216
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10240896
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	208
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jean Doloughan
Headteacher	Alison Richardson
Website	http://www.ststephenscofe.durham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There is an on-site breakfast club managed by the school.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- A section 48 inspection to evaluate the distinctiveness and effectiveness of St Stephen's Church of England Primary School as a church school took place in January 2019. The school was judged to be good. The timing of the next section 48 inspection will be determined by guidance in the National Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools Framework. A date has not yet been set.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held discussions with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders and members of staff. The inspector met

with members of the governing body and held telephone conversations with the school improvement partner and the diocesan director of education.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour throughout the school day, including during lesson visits and at breaktimes and lunchtimes. The inspector spoke to groups of pupils about their views on behaviour and the wider experiences they receive at school.
- The inspector met with staff and governors to check their understanding of safeguarding and the impact of any training received. The inspector scrutinised the single central record of recruitment checks, checked procedures for the safer recruitment of staff and held a meeting with the designated leader for safeguarding.
- The inspector reviewed the school's self-evaluation and leaders' plans for improvement.
- The inspector considered the views of parents, pupils and staff as part of the review of the responses to Ofsted's online surveys.

Inspection team

Alison Stephenson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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