

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

Abbotsham, Bideford, Devon EX39 5AP

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 November 2022

Outcome

St Helen's Church of England School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are valued members of this family-oriented community. They rightly say everyone is friendly and looks out for one another. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are included fully in school life. Pupils do not believe there is bullying. They recognise that staff look after them and sort issues out quickly. This helps them to feel safe.

Pupils respond very well to the high expectations of staff. They show particularly strong attitudes to their learning. Leaders ensure staff focus on developing pupils' character. This helps pupils to make a difference locally and further afield. Occasionally, some pupils need reminding about how to move calmly around the school. However, this does not stop the orderly and safe atmosphere.

Most parents are positive about the impact of the school on their children. They believe their children are safe and well looked after. They also recognise that good behaviour is promoted well in several ways, through outdoor learning and the school's Christian ethos. Some parents rightly believe some subjects could be stronger elements of the overall curriculum. Others agree with pupils, that they would like more clubs and activities on offer.

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

Leaders' expectations of pupil achievement are high. Effective governance holds leaders to account well. This helps leaders ensure staff live up to these expectations. Staff plan learning that captures the interest and imagination of pupils, including those with SEND. Consequently, the school's curriculum is delivered successfully. It meets leaders' intent to ensure pupils 'Learn to love, love to learn and aspire to serve, so they become inspiring change makers.'

Teaching pupils to read is the number one priority for everyone. Leaders have established a robust early reading offer. Children learn letter sounds from the moment they start in

Reception. Teachers and support staff deliver carefully planned learning. This helps pupils to learn their sounds one step at a time. Books are appropriately matched to what pupils know.

Pupils 'learn to love' reading. They speak happily about stories they have grown to enjoy. Pupils like how teachers help them to develop a love of reading. For example, they are proud of the library and enjoy the quizzes they do when they finish reading a book.

Some subjects are very well planned and implemented. For example, leaders have ensured the mathematics curriculum is carefully and deliberately sequenced. Staff use teach sequences of learning that build effectively on what pupils know and can do. Teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics is exceptionally strong. They use this to explain new ideas to pupils with precision. Teachers assess carefully what pupils remember and fill gaps when needed.

Conversely, leaders know that a few subjects are not as well thought out. For example, the history curriculum is newer in its development. The curriculum design is not as well sequenced and there is less clarity about what pupils should know. As a result, teachers are less clear about what they want pupils to know. For example, pupils know lots of things that happened in the past. However, they are not sure about when they happened and what it means to get better at history. They do not know how to make clear judgements about the past when looking at sources of evidence.

Overall, pupils achieve well. Pupils apply their knowledge well in subjects where the curriculum is more established, such as English and mathematics. Where curriculum planning is newer, pupils do not remember consistently the most important things. This means when they are asked to complete more complex tasks, they struggle to draw on the knowledge they need to be successful.

Children learn well in the early years. Leaders are ambitious for the children. Staff deliver leaders' vision with enthusiasm. They are knowledgeable about the areas of learning they teach. The impact of this is clear in how successfully children learn to read and understand early mathematics. Children are encouraged to make the most of every learning moment through play and when learning from their teachers.

Pupils' wider development is promoted exceptionally well. The character cornerstone of the curriculum ensures that pupils' broader development is taught explicitly and constantly reinforced. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very effectively. For example, pupils recognise the contribution they make as global and local citizens. Fundamental British values link seamlessly with the values that underpin the curriculum. Consequently, pupils learn about different cultures, diversity, different types of family and the importance of democracy and the rule of law in many different ways.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders are knowledgeable about safeguarding. Systems and processes are established. Records are kept well. The trust's

'social inclusion team' give hands on support for leaders. This allows leaders to ensure needs are identified early and delivered in a timely way.

Leaders ensure staff have appropriate training. Staff follow policy and process diligently. All work hard to look after the pupils. They know the children and their families very well.

Safer recruitment processes are well established. Appropriate checks are made on the suitability of staff. Checks are kept appropriately on a single central register.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There are a few subjects where curriculum thinking is more recent. In these subjects, leaders have not thought carefully enough about what they want pupils to remember and when. This means pupils do not build their knowledge well enough. Leaders need to think more carefully about the most important things pupils need to know and the order to learn them in these subjects. They must ensure that teachers are knowledgeable about what they need to do to check how well pupils remember the most important things to make strong progress.

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/outstanding. 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 predecessor school, St Helen's Church of England Primary School, to be good in June 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	145769
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10256725
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	211
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mrs Gill Marlow
Headteacher	Mrs Rebecca Northcott
Website	www.ash-sch.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- St Helen's Church of England is smaller than the average primary school. There are currently seven classes.
- The academy has 211 pupils on roll.
- Since the predecessor school's inspection, the school joined the Alumnis Multi-Academy Trust. At this time, the age range was lowered from four-year-olds to two-year-olds. However, at the time of this inspection, children did not start at the school until the beginning of Reception at four years old. There are eight other schools in the trust.

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 school leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation.
- The inspector met with senior and subject leaders, the chief executive officer of the trust, the director of education and the special educational needs coordinator. The inspector also met with the chair of the board of trustees and the chair of the local schools committee. The inspector discussed leaders' evaluations, priorities for improvement and the curriculum.

- The inspector did deep dives into three subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. As part of these deep dives, the inspector met with senior and subject leaders, teachers and pupils. The inspector also visited lessons, scrutinised pupils' work and talked to pupils. The inspector listened to some pupils read.
- The inspector analysed 61 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online parents' survey and the free-text responses from those parents. He also analysed 13 responses to the staff survey and 21 responses from pupils to the pupil survey.
- The inspector analysed school documentation, including leaders' evaluations and plans for improvement and paperwork relating to the work of trustees and local governors. He scrutinised a range of policies and procedures, including those that relate to the curriculum.
- The inspector reviewed safeguarding arrangements by meeting with the designated safeguarding lead, the 'social inclusion officer', reviewing safer recruitment processes and speaking to staff and pupils. School policies, governance arrangements, records of concern and links to other agencies were scrutinised.

Inspection team

Matthew Barnes, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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