

Inspection of a good school: Folkestone St. Mary's Church of England Primary Academy

Warren Road, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 6QH

Inspection dates:

19 and 20 October 2021

Outcome

Folkestone St. Mary's Church of England Primary Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They feel safe and cared for by staff who know them well. Pupils appreciate the school's Christian ethos, and understand the values of friendship, service, compassion and forgiveness. Mostly, pupils get along with each other. To help them when they do not, staff teach pupils how to disagree politely and fall out respectfully.

There are high expectations for every single pupil. Staff aim for all pupils to keep up, rather than need to catch up. If pupils do fall behind, their support is carefully planned. Pupils enjoy their learning, particularly in mathematics.

Behaviour at the school is well managed. Pupils in all classes are motivated learners. Staff are trained so that they can identify any early signs of bullying. Bullying is tackled quickly and effectively if it does occur. Pupils help to maintain the positive and respectful culture. For example, the school council carries out a regular 'bully watch' in the playground.

Parents appreciate that school staff recognise each individual child's strengths and accomplishments. They know their children feel accepted for who they are. Parents and pupils both value the weekly Friday hot chocolate with the headteacher for pupils who consistently follow school rules and values.

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

Leaders have developed a strong curriculum in English and mathematics. Children in the Nursery begin to learn the important communication and language skills they need for future success. This means that when they reach Reception, they are ready to begin the school's phonics programme. All staff are determined that every child will learn to read. Those who are at risk of falling behind are taught by staff who have the most expertise. Some children in Reception who need further support also receive a well-planned speech

and language programme that has been carefully designed to help them with their phonics. As children progress through the phonics programme, they read books which help them to practise the sounds they have learned. As pupils become more fluent readers, they begin a comprehension programme that focuses on developing pupils' understanding of language. Staff across the school read pupils a range of high quality and engaging texts daily to help pupils to develop their love of reading.

The mathematics curriculum has been well planned. Staff deliver it expertly from early years through to Year 6. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are, wherever possible, supported to keep up through additional support within their class. When pupils have fallen behind, or are working at a different pace to their peers, they receive a very carefully planned mathematics curriculum that is both ambitious and appropriate to their needs. Because mathematics is taught very well at the school, all pupils experience success as they become more fluent and proficient over time. This contributes to pupils' self-esteem and, in addition, they really enjoy their learning in mathematics.

The school has recently moved away from subject-specialist teachers teaching history, geography and science. Class teachers now teach the full range of national curriculum subjects. Leaders have identified that in some subjects, for example history and geography, they now need to set out the knowledge that pupils will learn more precisely. This will ensure that all teachers know what pupils have learned previously and what they are building towards in each subject. Leaders also know that they must ensure that, over time, all teachers build their subject-specific knowledge of each subject that they teach.

Leaders have carefully considered how to engage learners through a purposeful curriculum. Pupils of all ages learn how to engage with their immediate environment as active citizens, learning how to bring about positive change within their community. For example, Year 6 pupils are currently writing to their local Member of Parliament because they have identified that wheelchair access to the local beach could be improved. In addition, pupils also study an international curriculum, which extends their world view and enables them to engage with communities from around the world.

This is a strongly inclusive school, and leaders are committed to ensuring that all pupils develop the learning behaviours that they need to be successful now and into the future. The headteacher has implemented clear systems to help staff to manage behaviour. This has led to a considerable improvement in pupils' behaviour over time and behaviour now rarely disrupts teaching.

Within this standalone academy, leaders and those responsible for governance have a clear shared vision of a school that enables every child to flourish. They have identified those pupils who need the most support to succeed as their 'championed children'. These pupils sit at the heart of all strategic planning, as leaders know that when the curriculum is right for these pupils it will be right for all pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff are aware of the risks that pupils need to be protected from. Staff know the signs that might indicate that a child is at risk of harm, or has been harmed. There are clear systems in place for staff to follow when they have a concern about the safety of a pupil. These concerns are shared in a timely way with the local authority. Leaders make effective use of early help services. Leaders are proactive in identifying the specific risks that children within their local community face. These risks are then addressed through the curriculum, including online safety.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have sequenced the curriculum in each subject. However, in some subjects the learning sequences are set out in broad terms, and teachers decide the specific knowledge that pupils will learn. Not all teachers have good enough subject-specific knowledge to be able to do this effectively in each subject that they teach. Therefore, teaching in some subjects does not effectively build on what pupils have learned previously to help pupils connect new knowledge with existing knowledge. Leaders must now ensure that for each subject they set out the specific concepts and knowledge that pupils must learn in order to reach the ambitious end points set out within the curriculum. Leaders must also ensure that their professional development programme for teachers and support staff is aligned to the curriculum, so that over time teachers' subject-specific knowledge of all subjects continues to be developed. The transition arrangements have been applied.

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 first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in September 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. 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

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| Unique reference number | 139310 |
| Local authority | Kent |
| Inspection number | 10200088 |
| 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 | 450 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair | Emma Lane |
| Headteacher | Trevor North |
| Website | www.stmarysfolkestone.com |
| Date of previous inspection | 21 – 22 September 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The school has provision for two-year-olds within the Nursery.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- This is a Church of England school within the Diocese of Canterbury. A section 48 inspection (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) was undertaken in February 2017.
- The school has before- and after-school childcare provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator, and other members of the senior leadership team. The inspector met with representatives of the board of trustees and the diocese.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work. For the early reading deep dive, the inspector listened to younger pupils reading to a familiar adult and heard older pupils read. The inspector also spoke to leaders about some other subjects.
- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector checked the single central record, reviewed safeguarding records and spoke to leaders, staff and pupils.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documentation including leaders' evaluation of the school, school improvement plans, curriculum plans, and a sample of support plans for pupils with SEND, including education, health and care plans.
- The inspector talked to pupils about their learning, what behaviour is like at the school and whether they feel safe at school.
- The inspector reviewed pupil, staff and parent surveys.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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