

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

Robert Burns Avenue, Benhall, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL51 6NU

Inspection dates:

28 February and 1 March 2023

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders ensure that the school values of 'forgiveness, aspire, compassion and engage' (FACE) are at the heart of everything they do. They are ambitious for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils work hard and take pride in their many achievements.

Pupils treat each other, staff and visitors with respect. Expectations of behaviour are high. Bullying is not tolerated, and staff work carefully to resolve any issues that occur. Pupils feel safe and secure in this nurturing environment where they can talk to a trusted adult if ever they feel worried.

Pupils enjoy extensive opportunities to enrich their learning, explore their interests and take responsibility. Leaders ensure that as many pupils as possible take part in a wide range of clubs, activities and experiences. Pupils relish leadership roles, such as sports leaders, library monitors and school councillors, which make a positive contribution to school life. They are active fundraisers and have made close local and global links.

Pupils learn how to express their opinion and understand the importance of valuing the views of others. As one pupil explained, 'It's important to keep an open mind, you can then decide what you believe in.'

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

Senior leaders expect the very best from everyone, including themselves. They successfully combine this with kindness and understanding. Parents are highly appreciative of the school's work. One reflected the views of others in the comment, 'My child's educational experience has been transformed. He now gets the support he needs to succeed, and staff always go over and above.'

Leaders across the school are continuing to embed an aspirational curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils, including pupils with SEND. Teachers are confident and skilful in

their delivery of the curriculum. They work together and engage in professional development to build their subject knowledge and expertise. Staff are passionate about pupils' learning and make sure that the experiences pupils have are challenging and stimulating. Teachers check on pupils' learning regularly and use this helpfully to inform future teaching.

Leaders understand that being a good reader allows pupils to access the whole curriculum. They want all pupils to love reading and to read with fluency and comprehension. Leaders have recently introduced a phonics programme. This helps pupils at the early stages of learning to read to become fluent readers quickly. Leaders are making sure that all staff receive appropriate training to deliver the programme effectively.

Pupils concentrate hard in lessons. They work well on their own, showing determination and resilience but also work equally well together. Pupils value the individual care they receive. On the whole, pupils remember important knowledge in each subject and teachers are becoming skilled at helping them to do this. However, pupils' work and understanding in some subjects do not always reflect the intended learning. Leaders are improving the curriculum further so that all pupils, including those with SEND, achieve highly in every subject.

There is a determination, driven by the headteacher and shared by all staff, that pupils should thrive in their personal as well as academic development. There are a huge range of opportunities for pupils to broaden their experience and improve their personal skills. Leaders ensure that pupils learn about the wider world, consider the views and experiences of others, and reflect upon what this means. Leaders have forged strong links with a school in Tanzania to enrich pupils' cultural awareness. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the outdoor learning opportunities provided. These are carefully crafted to enhance learning across the curriculum.

Governors challenge and support leaders appropriately so that the school's plans for improvement are ambitious and stay on track. Leaders know the school and its pupils very well. They value the voice of the staff team and have due regard for workload and well-being. As a result, staff feel appreciated and are proud to be part of this vibrant and thriving school community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders promote a safeguarding culture where pupils' safety is prioritised. Staff are well trained to spot and raise concerns. Leaders ensure that pupils who are at risk of harm receive the help that they need quickly, seeking outside agency support when required. Leaders' actions bring about positive change for pupils and families. Leaders know the community well. They make sure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Checks on adults appointed to work in the school are thorough and

monitored effectively by leaders. During the inspection, leaders corrected minor weaknesses in record keeping.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Not all pupils who are struggling to learn to read are catching up as quickly as they could. Leaders have correctly identified the next steps for improvement. They must ensure that all staff know how to support this group of pupils as they learn to read and follow the school's agreed process.
- Pupils' work and understanding in some subjects do not always reflect the intended learning. Pupils do not always have detailed knowledge and skills across all subjects. Leaders should continue to refine the curriculum and ensure that pupils, including those with SEND, achieve highly in every subject.

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 April 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	115712
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10256757
Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	239
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Trevor Cooling
Headteacher	Angharad Fitch
Website	www.stmarksjunior.com
Date of previous inspection	13 July 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Diocese of Gloucester.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspector carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school 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 meetings with the headteacher and other senior leaders. The inspector met with governors, including the chair of governors. He had a meeting with a representative from Gloucestershire local authority. The inspector also had a telephone conversation with the interim Gloucester Diocesan Director of Education.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and art and design. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and teaching assistants, spoke

to some pupils about their learning and looked at a sample of pupils' work. The inspector also heard pupils read.

- The inspector considered the wider curriculum and met with the computing curriculum leader.
- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector reviewed a wide range of safeguarding documentation, including the school's record of recruitment checks. The inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead. The inspector also spoke with pupils and staff.
- The inspector took account of parents' responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and parents' written comments. The inspector also spoke to groups of parents on the afternoon of the second day of inspection.
- The inspector gathered pupils' views throughout each day, including during lesson visits. The inspector considered responses to the pupil survey.
- The inspector met with a range of staff to gather their views about the school and took account of staff's responses to Ofsted's confidential staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Alan Derry, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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