

Inspection of a good school: St Mary's CofE Academy Stotfold

Rook Tree Lane, Stotfold, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 4DL

Inspection dates: 15–16 January 2020

Outcome

St Mary's CofE Academy Stotfold continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Despite growing in size, St Mary's remains a happy, caring community. Almost all pupils respond admirably to staff's high expectations of them. Pupils are keen to learn and behave well. Many achieve well across the curriculum. This is because learning is usually taught and organised effectively. Pupils enjoy the various clubs and trips that add to what they learn in class.

There are many opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility and play an active role in their community. The school council represent the views of all pupils well. Sports leaders help to organise clubs and sports day. Some older pupils listen to younger ones read. I saw pupils confidently leading an assembly alongside the local vicar.

Leaders make sure that individuals get the help that they need to get through difficult times. Pupils are polite and respectful of others' views and beliefs. Teachers and pupils help anyone who is new quickly settle in and feel welcome. Pupils trust staff. There is always someone pupils can turn to if they have worries. Pupils know the difference between bullying and falling out. They say both are rare and are confident that adults will help to resolve disagreements.

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

Over the past 18 months, leaders have thoughtfully redesigned the curriculum in each subject. They have carefully identified what pupils need to learn. Curriculum leaders organise what pupils will learn in a logical order. Teachers are suitably trained to teach most subjects well. Pupils' work is of a good quality in a range of subjects. Subject plans for geography are more recent. Learning in geography is not yet as well delivered as in other subjects.

Leaders put reading at the heart of pupils' learning. Children learn the skills of reading from the start of Reception. Adults teach phonics well. They make sure that books are well matched to the sounds that pupils know. Pupils quickly learn to read and understand

what they are reading. Those pupils who fall behind get the help that they need to become more confident readers. Pupils' enjoyment of reading is testament to leaders' efforts to encourage reading. Leaders have done lots of work so that parents can also support children's reading skills at home.

Children make a great start to learning in Reception. Classrooms and the outside area are inviting and purposeful learning environments. Children settle quickly. They respond splendidly to thoughtfully planned learning activities and adults' high expectations. They develop the attributes and knowledge that helps learning in Year 1. This is particularly the case in reading, writing and mathematics.

Teachers know what pupils should learn and remember in different subjects by the end of each year. Teachers are quick at spotting and putting right pupils' misunderstandings. They provide opportunities for pupils to practise and recall important knowledge. This helps pupils to learn and remember more over time. This is particularly the case in mathematics. Pupils use their mathematics knowledge confidently, including in their science and geography work.

Adults know individual pupils' barriers to learning. Teachers make sure that learning is suitably demanding and accessible for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders seek outside advice and training to help teachers do this. Most pupils with SEND make strong gains in their learning and independence.

Leaders check on how well teachers deliver the planned curriculum. However, they do not always spot when teachers are not helping pupils to learn and remember things as well as they could. Leaders sometimes miss chances to help teachers make teaching even better.

Pupils value their learning and have positive attitudes to school. Parents agree. Leaders make sure that pupils get the help they need to improve their behaviour or attendance.

Leaders ensure that the school's values and curriculum support pupils' personal development very well. One parent's comment sums up the feelings expressed by many others: 'The atmosphere of the school is so warm and caring. My child feels valued and has grown in confidence.' Pupils learn to treat others equally and with respect, even if their views are different. Museum and theatre trips and taking part in plays and musical events help to broaden pupils' experiences. There are lots of clubs where pupils can follow their own interests. Leaders make sure that these opportunities are available to all pupils.

Leaders and trustees make sure they take account of staff well-being. Staff are overwhelmingly supportive of leaders and their aspirations for all pupils and the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and trustees make sure safeguarding has the highest priority. Staff are well trained to spot the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm in its different forms. They

know how and when to raise concerns. The headteacher, who is the designated safeguarding leader, maintains accurate records of actions taken to keep pupils safe. Help from outside agencies is sought quickly when needed.

Pupils learn how to stay safe in a range of different situations, including online, in ways appropriate for their age.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have worked with colleagues in local schools to identify the important knowledge that pupils need to learn to be well prepared for middle school. They have done this in a considered way. The timescale for change has been realistic and has not overloaded teachers or curriculum leaders. The development of subject plans and training for teachers in a very few subjects, most notably geography, is more recent than in other subjects. Leaders should ensure that teachers receive the training and support they need to implement the planned curriculum effectively.
- There are systems in place to monitor the quality of education provided. However, these could be used more effectively. Leaders do not always identify those occasions when teaching is not as effective in supporting pupils' understanding as is usually the case. Leaders need to ensure that their checks on how the curriculum each subject is being implemented identify precisely any additional support or guidance that staff need to improve teaching and learning further.

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 school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, 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 convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged St Mary's Church of England Academy Stotfold to be good on 5–6 May 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 Ofsted Parent View information 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

Unique reference number	138022
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10121447
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	269
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Rob Thornley and Anna Matthews (co-chairs)
Headteacher	Sam Bishop
Website	www.stmarysacademystotfold.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 May 2016

Information about this school

- St Mary's Church of England Primary Academy is a lower school in the Diocese of St Albans. It is an academy but is not part of a multi-academy trust. A board of trustees, who also serve as the governing body, is responsible for governance.
- Pupils join the school aged four in Reception and leave at the end of Year 4. The school has grown in size since the previous inspection. It is an average-sized primary school. There are now two classes for each year group in the school. Previously, pupils were taught in mixed-age classes.
- Almost all pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils with SEND in receipt of an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) is broadly average. The proportion of pupils with SEND who do not have an EHC plan is below average.
- The religious character of the school was most recently inspected under section 48 of the Education Act (2005) in April 2018. It was judged to be outstanding.

Information about this inspection

- I met with the headteacher and other senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) and four members of the board of trustees. I also held a telephone conversation with a school improvement partner who works with the school.
- To evaluate the quality of education, I carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, geography and science. In each subject, I visited lessons in all key stages, scrutinised pupils' work (this included listening to pupils read) and held discussions with subject leaders, teachers and pupils. I also reviewed curriculum plans in a range of other subjects and made short visits to lessons to see pupils learning a range of subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, I reviewed a range of documentation including school policies, procedures and records. I met with the headteacher, who is also the designated leader for safeguarding, to discuss and review examples of the actions taken to keep pupils safe. I also checked staff members' understanding of how to keep pupils safe from harm.
- I gathered pupils' views on the school by speaking to groups of pupils from the lessons that I had visited and by speaking to pupils in their lessons and at informal times, such as lunchtime and before school. I reviewed the 64 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- I considered the 123 response to Ofsted Parent View, the online survey for parents, including 78 free-text responses. I also spoke to parents before school.
- There were 29 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey, which I considered alongside views gathered when I met with staff.

Inspection team

Paul Wilson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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