

Inspection of Bitterne Church of England Primary School

Brownlow Avenue, Southampton SO19 7BX

Inspection dates:	4 and 5 February 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Bitterne is a school where 'love, trust and forgiveness' underpin everything. Pupils are happy and kind to each other. They play well together and listen carefully in class. The school is calm, and everyone knows the rules for good behaviour. Teachers help to manage pupils' behaviour in a positive way.

The school wants all pupils to do their best. However, some pupils do not achieve well. This is because of gaps in their learning, especially in English and mathematics. Some children in the early years do not secure the basic literacy and numeracy skills they need to do well in key stage 1.

Although the school's new leaders are working hard to improve pupils' outcomes, there remains work to do. The school has made progress in tackling the areas that require improvement, but this is not yet realised in how well pupils are ready academically for the next stage of their education.

Pupils learn to be responsible, respectful and safe. They know how to look after their physical and mental health, stay safe online and make good friends. The personal development programme is helping them grow as young people, build confidence and develop important life skills.

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

Published outcomes in 2024 were significantly below the national average. Many pupils left the school without the literacy and numeracy skills they needed. Under new leadership, the school has set about reversing a decline in standards. Renewed ambition and a strong drive to improve pupils' life chances are clear. Governors have reflected on the educational standards at the school and are starting to dig deeper to check how well pupils achieve.

Senior leaders and governors have set out a strategic plan to rapidly improve the quality of education. Currently, some key priorities have not been achieved. Staff and governors are clearer on what success will look like in pupils achieving well. In this time of change, leaders are mindful of everyone's workload as new initiatives are swiftly put into place.

Pupils at the early stages of learning to read and write are not successfully picking up the skills they need. The school has reviewed its reading provision and has recently introduced a new phonics programme to lift standards. However, not all staff are clear enough about how to teach reading fluency and the building blocks of writing. Although pupils regularly rehearse the sounds they know, some do not keep up with the reading and writing expectations of the phonics programme. Pupils who require extra support receive help based on the gaps in their knowledge.

To raise standards, the school has introduced a new and ambitious curriculum. It is enthusing pupils and providing a clear roadmap of what pupils need to know and do. However, older pupils have gaps in their knowledge and have not had the time to benefit

from the new content. The school has prioritised the teaching of essential content from earlier year groups so that older pupils can learn new information securely.

There are inconsistencies in the teaching of the curriculum. The school is addressing these by providing ongoing training for staff. Nevertheless, some staff are not skilled enough in setting work for pupils that will raise their achievement and address previous shortfalls. Furthermore, some adults do not spot where pupils might have misconceptions. This means that pupils can struggle to complete their work and remember the most important knowledge. Weaknesses in some pupils' writing skills hinder how well they achieve across the curriculum.

There are effective systems to identify early the specific needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has high expectations that pupils with SEND access the same curriculum as others. Adults work hard to remove any barriers to learning. Nevertheless, some staff are not making the right adjustments to help all pupils learn as well as their classmates.

The school strongly prioritises pupils' attendance and punctuality. This work has ensured that pupils attend regularly. Staff work closely with parents to help them see how important coming to school is. As a result, fewer pupils are persistently absent from school.

In the early years, staff do not consistently provide children with the advice and guidance they need to build their knowledge. They do not routinely design activities that provide opportunities for children to practise applying what they have learned. Therefore, some children are not as well prepared for key stage 1 as they should be. Improvements are now seen in children engaging more often in meaningful learning and in how adults actively promote children's independence.

Pupils love the educational visits and helping their local community. They also enjoy using virtual reality headsets to experience life in other countries. Pupils are enthusiastic about school life. They are polite and eager to talk to adults and visitors.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some staff are not knowledgeable enough about the teaching of early reading and writing. Consequently, some pupils are not learning the literacy skills they need. The phonics programme has recently changed and is at an early stage of implementation. The school must make sure that all staff continue to receive training to teach the phonics programme so that pupils appropriately learn to read and write.

- In the early years, some adults do not support children effectively to build their learning. Therefore, some children are not routinely benefiting from activities that help them to learn the intended curriculum. The school should fully carry out its action plan to improve early years so that children achieve well.
- The teaching of the curriculum is variable across the school. Some teachers are not always effectively checking pupils' learning or providing ambitious tasks. As a result, some pupils are not reaching year group expectations. The school needs to improve teachers' understanding of where pupils need to be academically and how best to deliver what is planned.
- The school's quality assurance checks are not consistently providing the information needed to bring about improvements in outcomes for all pupils. As a result, some of the less effective aspects of the school's practice have not been addressed. This includes in relation to the teaching of the curriculum and how well pupils learn. The school has implemented significant changes since the change in leadership. The school must make certain that changes are fully evaluated and embedded to ensure continued improvement in pupils' achievement.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	116339
Local authority	Southampton
Inspection number	10341443
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	409
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Amanda Humby
Headteacher	Jen Johnson
Website	www.bitterneceprimary.net
Date of previous inspection	28 February 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the St Mary's Partnership, a collective of four Southampton primary schools. It joined the partnership in September 2024.
- The headteacher started in September 2023. The executive leader, Daniel Constable-Phelps, who oversees the partnership, provides additional support. He began this role when the school joined the St Mary's Partnership.
- As a Church of England primary school, Bitterne is part of the Diocese of Winchester. It had a section 48 inspection for schools of a religious character in February 2024.
- The school is not currently using any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive leader, headteacher and other staff. The lead inspector met with five governors, including the chair. He also spoke with two school improvement advisers from the local authority. He held a telephone conversation with a representative from the diocese.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English, mathematics, science and history. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The views of staff, pupils and parents were gathered through discussions and Ofsted's online surveys.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's improvement priorities and evaluation, policies, curriculum documents, behaviour and attendance records, minutes of governors' meetings, visit reports from the local authority and published outcomes.

Inspection team

James Broadbridge, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
James Everett	Ofsted Inspector
Tracy Good	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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