

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School

Oakfield Road, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 7LX

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 January 2025

Outcome

St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Primary School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils describe this school as a safe and welcoming place. The friendly atmosphere ensures that new pupils settle in quickly. Pupils know how the school values help them to show respect to others and be ready to learn. They understand that staff expect them to work hard and do their best. Pupils live up to these expectations and achieve well in many areas of the curriculum.

The school promotes positive behaviour. Across the school, pupils are polite and extremely courteous. They understand and follow the school rules well. This starts in Nursery, where children take turns and listen carefully. Staff provide high-quality pastoral support for pupils who struggle to manage their emotions.

Pupils feel cared for. Relationships are strong between adults and pupils. Pupils trust adults to listen to them. They talk positively about how their 'I wish our teacher knew' boxes help them to share any worries or concerns they may have.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of clubs, including karate, choir and netball. They take pride in becoming house captains, librarians and 'mini chaplains'. Pupils say these roles give them an opportunity to be heard and help them to make decisions to improve the school.

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

The school ensures that the best interests of pupils are at the heart of the decisions it makes. It knows what it does well and what improvements it needs to make to strengthen further the quality of education that pupils receive. For example, the school

has been quick to analyse why recent outcomes in spelling, punctuation and grammar in Year 6 were not as strong as expected. Pupils now have more opportunities to apply this knowledge. For example, older pupils confidently use expanded noun phrases to improve their writing.

The school has high expectations of what pupils can achieve. There are robust systems in place to identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) at the earliest stage. Individual pupil plans are precise and routinely reviewed. An ambitious and inclusive curriculum has been carefully designed to meet pupils' needs. The curriculum makes clear the important knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn and when. In mathematics, for example, children in the early years use words such as 'more than' and 'fewer' when counting items. Older pupils use their knowledge of multiplication to solve more complex division problems involving remainders. Where appropriate, learning is adapted. Pupils with SEND use objects to support their understanding of number effectively.

The school prioritises teaching pupils to read. Pupils talk about how reading helps them to stay calm. Older pupils understand how the texts they read, such as 'Ghost Boys', help them to think twice about their actions. Children in the early years begin learning to read as soon as they start school. Staff use their training to deliver the school's phonics programme effectively. Pupils quickly learn and remember new sounds. If pupils fall behind, they receive the support they need to help them to catch up quickly.

Pupils learn well in most wider curriculum subjects. In history, for example, pupils accurately understand the causes of the Second World War and confidently recall facts about evacuation. However, in some areas of the curriculum, this is not the case. Some pupils struggle to make links to what they have learned before. This is because the checks the school makes are not used well enough to ensure that pupils are learning and remembering the curriculum. This makes it more difficult for pupils to build their knowledge over time.

Pupils behave well in lessons and during social times. They display positive attitudes to their learning. This starts in the early years, where children are excited to learn and eagerly share their ideas with adults.

The school has robust systems in place to track pupils' attendance. It acts quickly to address any gaps in attendance, working closely with pupils and their families. As a result, most pupils attend school regularly.

Pupils' personal development is a strength. The school provides pupils with a wide range of opportunities to learn important life skills, such as first aid or how to manage money. Pupils understand why tolerance and equality are important in the modern world they live in. They develop their character by raising money for a local neonatal unit. Pupils are well prepared for later life.

Governors have a clear vision for the school. They use their expertise to support and hold the school to account for its actions. There is a strong team ethos in the school. Staff feel

listened to. They value the opportunities they have to work together. This develops their teaching expertise.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Assessment is still being developed in some wider curriculum subjects. Where this is the case, it is not yet used well enough to check that pupils have remembered what they have been taught. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge and do not build it well over time. The school needs to ensure that teachers use assessment effectively so that pupils learn and remember the curriculum successfully in all subjects.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 school to be good for overall effectiveness in October 2019.

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	123784
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10344545
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	493
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mary Clothier
Headteacher	Morwenna Dunstan
Website	www.stmarysbridgwater.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 October 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher took up their post in September 2018.
- The school is a Church of England school, within the Diocese of Bath and Wells. The last section 48 inspection for schools with a religious character took place in February 2023.
- The school has provision for two-year-olds.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- 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. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspector met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, subject leaders and the special educational needs coordinator. They also met with groups of staff and pupils.
- The inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair. They also held telephone discussions with a representative from the local authority and a representative from the Diocese of Bath and Wells.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector listened to pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 read to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector 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 inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. Additionally, they spoke to pupils to discuss their views about the school.
- The inspector considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also took into consideration the online staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Ben Jordan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025