

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: St Nicholas At Wade Church of England Primary School

Down Barton Road, St Nicholas-At-Wade, Birchington, Kent CT7 0PY

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 March 2025

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that the school's work may have improved significantly across all areas since the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils grow as well-rounded, confident individuals in this excellent, nurturing and inclusive school. There is a strong culture of care and kindness where pupils thrive and flourish. All pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are challenged and supported to achieve their very best academically and personally. Expectations are high, and pupils respond exceptionally well. There is an uncompromising commitment that every child deserves the very best and strives to be 'the best you can be'. Pupils live up to the very high expectations.

There is an extremely calm ethos and purposeful atmosphere, with very happy pupils in every classroom. Pupils bubble with enthusiasm for learning. Their behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary, and consequently, they achieve highly. Pupils feel very safe in school and know that staff listen to them if they have any worries or concerns.

Pupils' well-being is given the highest priority. Pupils are respectful and kind and always willing to help each other out. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Many speak of its strong caring, community ethos. Reflecting the views of many, one commented, 'I feel like I'm handing my child over to family every day.'

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

The school has created an extremely well-designed and ambitious curriculum. The essential skills and knowledge pupils should learn and their order are clearly set out from the early years to Year 6. The curriculum is equally ambitious for disadvantaged pupils

and pupils with SEND as it is for all others. Very skilled staff ensure that pupils with SEND have access to the full curriculum and equal opportunities to learn.

Children get an excellent start in Reception. The environment inside and outside successfully supports children's early reading, writing and mathematical skills and inspires curiosity and imagination. The school identifies the needs of pupils accurately to provide appropriate challenge and support. Teachers skilfully check pupils' understanding using this information to address any misconceptions. Pupils are secure in subject-specific knowledge and skills. They access more complex concepts and make connections across their learning with great confidence.

Reading is a high priority across the school. There is an unwavering determination that every child will be a reader. Phonics skills are taught very effectively. Children quickly learn letters and the sounds they make and use their skills very well in their early reading and writing. They read books matched to the sounds they know. Staff quickly identify pupils who may be struggling and give them extra help to keep up. A love of reading is promoted all around the school and is inspired by teachers' enthusiasm. Pupils are introduced to a carefully chosen, wide range of high-quality, challenging texts that support learning across the curriculum. They are encouraged to read widely and often and develop as confident, fluent readers.

The school's values of courage, honesty, resilience and kindness are embedded deeply in the school's culture. They are demonstrated incredibly well by everyone in every aspect of school life. Pupils accept and respect differences in others' faiths and backgrounds and understand that some pupils learn in different ways. The collaboration, support, togetherness and kindness pupils demonstrate are outstanding. They are friendly, polite and interesting to talk to. The school has a sharp focus on improving attendance. Leaders work with determination to identify barriers to pupils' attendance and provide support to pupils and their families.

The school provides pupils with a rich range of activities beyond the academic, including a wide choice of after-school clubs, visits, visitors to school and special events. These experiences help bring learning to life and further enrich pupils' cultural, social and spiritual development. Pupils' maturity and character shine through in their actions and attitudes. Pupils appreciate the range of leadership roles offered. Pupils' excellent personal skills, as well as their high academic achievement, mean they are exceedingly well prepared for the future as mature, thoughtful and caring citizens.

Leaders ensure that all actions they take are in the very best interests of the pupils. They have been highly effective in improving the performance of the school. Staff are happy and proud to work at the school. They feel greatly valued and work as a skilled, enthusiastic and dedicated team. They appreciate the consideration given to their workload and well-being. Governors support and challenge leaders and share the vision to make a positive difference in pupils' lives. There is no complacency but a steely determination to build on current successes and secure further improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 to be 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	118698
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10341511
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Max Gregory
Headteacher	Taralee Kennedy
Website	www.st-nicholas-birchington.kent.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	1 and 2 October 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher took up her post in September 2022.
- As a Church of England school, it is part of the Diocese of Canterbury. Its most recent section 48 inspection was in March 2018.
- The school does not use any 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 held meetings with the headteacher and the senior leadership team, curriculum leaders and other staff.
- The inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair of the

governing body.

- The inspector held a telephone conversation with the school's local authority adviser and met with the director of education from Viking Academy Trust who has worked with the school.
- 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 visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector examined a range of documentation provided by the school, including its evaluation of its performance and its development plan.
- The inspector considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View and met with some parents at the gate at the beginning of the day. She also took into consideration the responses to the staff and pupil surveys, as well as speaking to staff and pupils throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Margaret Coussins, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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