

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The Abbey Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, St Albans

Grove Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 1DQ

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 April 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 relish attending this exceptionally happy school. They know that each day will be stimulating and varied. Pupils rise to the school's high expectations. They achieve exceptionally well across the school's ambitious curriculum.

The school has a strong sense of family. Pupils welcome and support each other, celebrating their similarities and differences. Older pupils are 'special friends' for children in Reception. Staff know pupils as individuals. They use this knowledge to ensure that pupils' needs are met and that their interests are developed. Pupils attend a raft of clubs, including fencing, chess and child-led creative writing. Many well-chosen trips enhance the curriculum. Pupils encounter many visitors, from different faiths and careers. In Year 6, local magistrates teach pupils about the legal system. Pupils learn about social issues, such as homelessness, and raise money for charity. Pupils are fully prepared to become active citizens.

Pupils have a plethora of opportunities to develop their leadership skills. The school council helped to develop the school's approach to behaviour, the 'Abbey Promise'. As a result, pupils understand and strive successfully to meet the school's high expectations of their behaviour. Pupils learn how to keep themselves healthy. They learn about road safety and how to safely use the internet.

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

The school has significantly improved its curriculum since the previous inspection. It has clearly identified what pupils need to know across all subjects, and how and when they should learn important knowledge. Teachers rigorously check pupils' knowledge, including when pupils join the school. Teachers identify and address pupils' misconceptions and any gaps in pupils' learning. They present new concepts clearly and give pupils the chance to practise what they have been taught before moving on to new learning. Staff have a precise understanding of pupils' needs and interests. They adjust the curriculum with great skill to ensure that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), access it successfully.

From the start in early years, children gain a strong foundation for future learning. The school is determined that all pupils read, write and use mathematical operations correctly and fluently. Pupils learn how to convey their ideas clearly and for different purposes and audiences. The curriculum provides pupils with many opportunities to work practically and find things out. For instance, in science, pupils experiment with sound insulation. In history, they use artefacts to find out about the lives of women in ancient Greece. Pupils progress through and learn the curriculum exceptionally well.

The school understands the importance of reading. From Reception, children learn to blend sounds into words. Staff match books precisely to pupils' abilities. If pupils need additional support with their phonics, they receive it. This helps them to become accurate and fluent readers. Pupils greatly enjoy reading a diverse range of texts.

Children in the Reception Year become confident and independent. They learn to focus on their work and to share and work together. Staff plan carefully to ensure that children, while developing their own interests and skills, take part in a broad range of activities to broaden their knowledge of the world around them. Staff promote children's language and communication skills effectively, including through high-quality interactions.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are enthused by their learning. The ambition and breadth of the curriculum plays a big part in this. Pupils are determined to be the best they can be. They are positive and polite. They play enthusiastically and cooperatively. If pupils need support or guidance to feel happy in school and focus on their work, staff provide this. Pupils really enjoy school. Their rates of attendance are high.

Pupils are fully prepared for life beyond school. They understand the importance of diversity. The school develops and broadens pupils' interests, such as in sport and music. The school has an important role in the local community. Pupils sing to the local elderly in the local community. Pupils get a very strong sense of right and wrong, and how they can make the world a better place for all.

Leaders and governors put pupils at the heart of every decision that they make. They do not rest on their laurels. They do whatever they can to make pupils' experiences of school the best they can be. The school supports and trains staff to develop and teach the

curriculum with real impact. Staff enjoy working here. Parents and carers rightly praise the quality of the provision that the school gives their children.

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 September 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	117449
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10345207
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	183
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Simon Oaten
Headteacher	Linda O'Melia
Website	www.abbey.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	24 and 25 September 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a member of the Diocese of St Albans. The school received its most recent section 48 inspection in May 2018.
- The school currently uses one registered alternative provision.
- The school operates before- and after-school provision for pupils.
- The headteacher was appointed in January 2022.

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 this evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and other senior staff, including the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator.
- The inspector spoke to the local authority's school effectiveness adviser.

- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspector met with members of the governing body.
- 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 spoke with several groups of pupils and observed their behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime.
- The inspector considered the responses and free-text comments received during the inspection to Ofsted Parent View. He took account of responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys. He also spoke to parents at the gate.

Inspection team

Steve Woodley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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