

Inspection of a good school: Houghton Regis Primary School

St Michael's Avenue, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 5DH

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 June 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are curious and caring. They try hard to collect house points and achieve the coveted 'star awards'. Pupils benefit greatly from the whole-school events that broaden their experiences. For instance, the 'cultural week' introduces pupils to languages, food and religions found around the world. Because the school teaches positively about difference, pupils feel comfortable being themselves. This ensures they feel happy and safe in school.

The school encourages pupils' aspirations. For example, there is a strong focus on sport and the performing arts. The extra-curricular clubs complement pupils' experiences in lessons. Many pupils access additional ballet and gymnastics lessons with trained professionals. Pupils then go on to complete graded exams and take part in inter-school competitions to demonstrate their sporting prowess.

Pupils' achievement varies. For example, Year 2 pupils are expert at counting in multiples and Year 5 pupils remember lots from their lessons on South America. However, dotted across the school are some shortcomings in the teaching pupils receive. At this time, these shortcomings are not being addressed as well as they could be. This is affecting how well pupils achieve.

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

During and shortly after the pandemic, the school went through a period of turbulence. There was a turnover of governors and staff. Leaders are working hard to steady the ship. They recruit colleagues with valuable experience and expertise. However, issues remain that hamper pupils' achievement.

The school's curriculum is well thought through. This is because curriculum leaders access appropriate training to strengthen their subject expertise. It shows in their ability to adopt or compile detailed curriculum plans. Staff welcome the guidance. They like how they have lesson planning and resources that they may tweak as opposed to having to start from scratch.

However, curriculum leaders are not given enough time to monitor teaching and learning. This makes it difficult to identify training needs and provide effective support. For example, sometimes staff ask questions that pupils cannot answer and they fail to adjust their teaching. This causes some pupils to lose interest and miss subsequent demonstrations, leading to mistakes in their work.

Starting in the early years, the school is steadfast in children securing the sounds letters make so they become successful readers. Leaders ensure that staff receive the training and resources required to teach the phonics programme well. Meticulous checks identify pupils who need extra help. These checks set out the required support to address gaps in pupils' understanding. Consequently, pupils' phonics achievement is improving.

However, the success in phonics is not translating into success in pupils' writing. This is because there are inconsistencies in teaching. For example, sometimes staff do not model the mechanisms of how to complete a written exercise. Because pupils are not shown and reminded how to do it well, they continue to make the same mistakes. Over time, these mistakes become entrenched and harder for staff to resolve.

The school shows strong dedication to aiding pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), offering a wide range of support services. This involves training staff through external experts, such as speech and language therapists. However, some parents seek more involvement from leaders to grasp the support process better. Staff also express concerns about the frequency and quality of SEND provision checks by the school and the lack of feedback on effectiveness.

The school has updated attendance and behaviour policies to clarify their approach. This has resulted in more pupils attending regularly and behaving well. However, there are still challenges, especially regarding the consistent teaching of behaviour expectations. For instance, sometimes, staff praise good manners while at other times they do not. This leads to inconsistent expectations.

The school's personal development programme is its crown jewel. Fostering pupils' creativity, musicality, and sporting prowess is crucial. For instance, swimming lessons exceed the minimum requirement. Dedicated staff offer pastoral support to make the school safe. For example, the 'lunchtime nurture club' gives vulnerable pupils a secure place to eat and socialise.

Parents and staff have mixed views about the school. Some parents value what it offers, and most staff enjoy working there. Yet, there are others who feel they lack information. They are sometimes unclear about the school's plans, expectations, and issue resolutions. Leaders and governors acknowledge the need for better engagement. There are plans to improve communication and systems, but these are not yet in place.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff do not explain and remind pupils enough about important foundational knowledge in writing. As a result, pupils struggle to communicate their ideas clearly in the written form. Leaders should ensure staff understand how best to approach the teaching of writing, as well as how to use their checks on pupils' writing to inform the feedback and support pupils receive.
- Leaders do not sufficiently prioritise curriculum implementation. There are too few checks on how well the curriculum and additional support for pupils with SEND, is being realised. As a result, leaders are unable to quickly spot how teaching could be improved. Leaders should be enabled to regularly evaluate the teaching of the curriculum to provide training and support to staff, so that pupils, including those with SEND, can learn more and remember more.

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 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 in May 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	109459
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10345085
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	391
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Tom Muldownie
Headteacher	James Edwards
Website	www.houghtonregisprimary.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	8 and 9 May 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school agreed with the local authority to exceed its published admissions number. Consequently, the number of pupils on roll has increased significantly since the last inspection.
- The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provider of education.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement 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 his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with leaders, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher for inclusion, school business manager, behaviour and English as an additional language lead, three governors and an education advisor working for the local authority.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector 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. The inspector also listened to a sample of pupils 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 reviewed a range of school documentation, including policies, development plans, evaluative reports from external advisers, and minutes of meetings of the full governing body.
- To account for the views of stakeholders, the inspector considered the 162 responses to the pupil survey, the 32 responses to the staff survey, and the 61 responses, including 44 free-text responses, to Ofsted Parent View. The inspector also reviewed the school's own parent survey, as well as holding separate discussions with groups of pupils and staff.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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