

Inspection of Our Lady Catholic Primary School

Old Hale Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 1XT

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 July 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a friendly and welcoming school. Relationships are positive. Pupils are happy and enjoy learning. Pupils benefit from a broad curriculum that develops their interests and their curiosity. They are keen to share their knowledge and their ideas. Pupils appreciate the various trips and visitors to school. These experiences help pupils connect their learning with the wider world. Pupils make good progress. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Pupils behave well. They are polite and respectful. Pupils respond to the high expectations that adults have of their learning and their behaviour. Pupils listen carefully to adults and to each other. Pupils are proud to take on additional responsibilities in school. They carry out their roles with commitment and enthusiasm.

Pupils feel safe. They are confident that adults will help them sort out any worries they may have. Pupils know who to talk to in school when they have any concerns. Pupils say that bullying is rare. When it happens, it is followed up quickly and resolved by staff.

Most parents and carers are positive about the school. They feel they are part of a caring school community in which their children flourish.

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

Leaders have carefully considered how the curriculum supports pupils to gain the important knowledge and understanding they need to achieve well from the Reception Year to Year 6. Pupils make good progress across the full range of subjects. Teachers plan lessons that build on what pupils have learned before. This helps pupils secure important knowledge in each subject. Teachers use assessment well to identify the specific areas of a subject where pupils need more practice. They promptly address any misunderstandings pupils may have. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is suitably adapted so that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn and achieve well alongside their peers.

Subject leaders are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. They support staff to teach the curriculum well. Many subject leaders are new to the role. Subject leaders monitor the implementation of the curriculum in their subject. Leaders recognise that the next step is to develop subject leaders' confidence so that they can make a strong contribution to developing the quality of education and the curriculum.

Reading is promoted across the school. Pupils practise their reading regularly and become confident and fluent readers. Leaders ensure that pupils experience a wide range of texts. Pupils deepen their understanding of texts they read and enjoy discussing the choices that authors make.

Leaders have introduced a new programme to teach systematic synthetic phonics. This programme is strengthening the teaching of early reading. Pupils in the Reception class and key stage 1 secure their phonics through daily teaching and regular practice. Pupils read books that match the sounds they are learning in school. Pupils learn to apply their phonics knowledge to decode unfamiliar words. Pupils in key stage 2 who are at the early stages of learning to read benefit from extra sessions that help them develop their phonics knowledge and reading fluency. Staff have received appropriate training to teach the new phonics programme. Leaders recognise there is work to do to ensure that the programme is implemented consistently well by all staff. This includes the additional support that pupils receive to develop their confidence and fluency in reading.

Children in the Reception class learn the routines and behaviours that enable them to be successful in school. Staff are skilful in their use of questions to develop children's thinking and their play. Children are taught how to hold a pencil and form their letters and numbers correctly. Children develop their language and communicate well with adults and with their peers. Children are gaining a good understanding of number and mathematical concepts through direct teaching, through stories, and through their play. Staff have high expectations of what children can and should achieve across the curriculum. Children are well prepared for key stage 1.

Pupils' personal development is supported well through the curriculum and the wider opportunities that are available, such as sport and music. Pupils learn to keep themselves and others safe, including online. Pupils learn about different cultures, their traditions and beliefs. Pupils learn to respect each other's differences and celebrate diversity.

Governors are diligent in their work. They ensure that leaders' actions are making a positive difference to improve the quality of education for all pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff receive relevant training and regular updates. This helps keep safeguarding at the forefront of everyone's mind. Staff are vigilant and well informed. They can recognise the signs of potential neglect or abuse. All staff understand the systems for recording and reporting concerns. Leaders take prompt action and work effectively with other agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils and families access the support they need.

Governors carry out regular checks to assure themselves that safeguarding procedures are robust and carried out effectively. This includes staff recruitment and pre-employment checks.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have introduced a new programme for the systematic teaching of synthetic phonics and early reading. Staff have taken part in relevant training. Leaders should ensure that staff continue to receive the guidance and training they need to implement the new programme well, building on the effective practice that is already in place. This includes ensuring that the additional support for pupils who are at the early stages of reading fluency is consistently strong.
- Some subject leaders are new to their role and need to develop confidence in their role. This is so they can drive further improvements in their subject and in the curriculum.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	138322
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10227311
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	169
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Patrick Leeson
Headteacher	Ciara Nicholson
Website	www.ourladysherts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 and 14 June 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a Catholic primary school that is part of the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust which contains five primary schools and six secondary schools. The school converted to become an academy in August 2012.
- The school received a section 48 inspection in May 2019.
- There have been significant changes in the membership of the governing body since the previous inspection. The chair of governors was appointed in October 2019.
- The school runs a breakfast club for pupils. There is a separately registered after-school club which provides after-school care to pupils on the school site.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, head of school and special educational needs coordinator.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders and pupils about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the lead inspector met with the designated leaders for safeguarding and reviewed records of safeguarding. Inspectors spoke to staff about the training they have received and how this helps them identify potential safeguarding concerns. Inspectors spoke with pupils to establish the extent to which they feel safe in school. The lead inspector reviewed the single central record of pre-employment checks. The lead inspector explored with leaders and governors the systems and processes that are in place to ensure the safeguarding of all members of the school community.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of governors and five members of the governing body. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the trust. The lead inspector talked to the school's improvement partner on the telephone.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their experience of school, including in the breakfast club.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at playtime. Inspectors reviewed the support and training that staff receive to help pupils manage their behaviour. The lead inspector reviewed records of behaviour, including bullying.
- Inspectors took account of the 55 responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the 38 free-text comments. Inspectors spoke with parents when they were collecting pupils at the end of the school day.
- Inspectors considered the 69 responses to the pupil survey and the 23 responses to the staff survey. Inspectors spoke to a range of pupils to find out their views of the school.

Inspection team

Katherine Douglas, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Nicola Shadbolt

Ofsted Inspector

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