

Inspection of a good school: Essendon CofE (VC) Primary School

School Lane, Essendon, Hertfordshire AL9 6HD

Inspection dates:

20 July 2022

Outcome

Essendon CofE (VC) Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils quickly learn and live up to the school's values, encapsulated in the 'Essendon Way'. Pupils behave with tolerance and respect, showing the love for others that ties in with the Christian ethos of the school. As a result, bullying is rare. When it does happen, it is dealt with sensitively.

Pupils learn about the different types of families. They get to experience stories and books from around the world. Pupils feel happy and safe to have different lifestyles and outlooks on life.

Pupils enjoy and benefit from enrichment opportunities such as educational visits and residential trips. They also learn new interests by participating in a range of clubs. There are lots of leadership opportunities, such as being one of the 'eco warriors' who have secured pupils' commitment to recycling.

Pupils experience a full curriculum and have access to lots of books. Most pupils develop a love of reading and live up to teachers' high expectations of what they can achieve.

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

Leaders have carefully mapped out an ambitious curriculum. Each subject has logical learning sequences. Teachers have received effective training in each subject area, so they have secure subject knowledge to deliver the curriculum effectively. This ensures that pupils learn and consolidate subject-specific skills, such as 'chronology' and 'timelines' in history, effectively.

Teachers check what pupils have learned at the end of units, and use this information to fill gaps in pupils' understanding. This ensures that pupils consolidate what they have learned. Some subjects are alternated and are not taught every week. Pupils sometimes forget some of what they have learned when they next come to study these subjects.

This means they sometimes struggle to apply what they have learned in the past to new learning.

Leaders have trained teachers in delivering an effective phonics programme to support early reading. Teachers give pupils lots of opportunities to practise the sounds they have learned, using books that are well matched to pupils' reading ability. As a result, pupils secure their understanding of how to decode and blend words. This provides the foundation for them to become confident, fluent readers.

Older pupils have access to a range of high-quality, diverse books which they read and discuss. The books and discussions often link to topical themes from assemblies or trips. Many pupils are inspired to read regularly and say that the school does all it can to encourage a love of reading.

Some aspects of early years provision are not as strong as provision elsewhere in the school. For example, in phonics, teachers do not tailor what they teach as closely to pupils' individual characteristics as teachers in other years do. In mathematics, teachers do not consistently support children to use physical resources effectively enough to understand abstract concepts well. As a result, some children do not progress as speedily as they should.

Staff support pupils to behave in a calm and orderly way. Leaders have ensured that lunchtimes and breaktimes have well-structured and organised activities.

Each year group has been on a trip. Residential visits form an important part of pupils' wider experience. Spirituality is supported through weekly assemblies linked to the school's Christian ethos. Pupils get daily opportunities to discuss current affairs through 'world events' sessions. This is all supported by an effective personal, social and health education programme. Leaders ensure that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Teachers usually meet the needs of the range of pupils effectively. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have their needs identified and there is equal ambition for them. However, the support for a small number of pupils involves them being removed from class for short periods of time for extra help. Consequently, these pupils miss some aspects of the curriculum. Arrangements made to help pupils catch up with this missed work are not as effective as they should be.

The school is well led and managed. The local governing body works collaboratively with school leaders to ensure the best outcomes for pupils. Particular work has gone on to engage with different sections of the local community. Leaders have also proactively worked to ensure parents understand the work the school is doing to help pupils understand fundamental British values and how to stay safe.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff use leaders' comprehensive training to identify and follow up any concerns about pupils' safety. Leaders listen to pupils and use what they learn to ensure pupils have a safe environment where they feel comfortable to talk about their worries.

Leaders work effectively with external agencies to secure the support families may need. They ensure that checks are undertaken on all adults at the school to determine their suitability to work with children.

Safeguarding records are sufficiently detailed to ensure children are safe. Inspectors found some minor administrative errors in records which were resolved during the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A minority of subjects are alternated and are not taught every week. Pupils sometimes forget between lessons what they have learned in the past. Teachers need to ensure they support pupils to connect what they have learned in the past with new learning.
- Some of the provision in early years lacks the same rigour as the rest of the school and is not as well matched to need. As a result, some pupils do not learn to read and write as well. Leaders need to ensure that provision in early years is well matched to needs, and pupils achieve high-quality learning, especially in literacy.
- Leaders' extra support for a minority of pupils involves those pupils coming out of some lesson time. As a result, these pupils miss out on some parts of the curriculum. Leaders need to ensure that all pupils are able to access the full curriculum.

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 a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in April 2013.

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	117393
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10241619
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	95
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing	Pauline Alleyne
Headteacher	Belinda Canham
Website	www.essendon.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher was appointed in September 2021, after being acting headteacher from May 2021.

Information about this inspection

The inspector(s) carried out this inspection under section 8 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.
- The school uses no alternative providers.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, inspectors met with curriculum leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- Inspectors conducted meetings with members of the local governing body and leaders of provision for SEND, behaviour and attendance, early years foundation stage and personal development. Inspectors also observed lunch and break times and spoke to parents before and after school.
- Inspectors explored the school's safeguarding culture through viewing safeguarding records and procedures, meeting with a range of pupils and staff, and talking to safeguarding leaders.
- Inspectors considered the 13 responses and 10 free-text responses made by parents to the survey, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also considered 12 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and 20 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

James Chester, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Al Mistrano

Her Majesty's Inspector

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