

Inspection of Welwyn St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

15 London Road, Welwyn, Hertfordshire AL6 9DJ

Inspection dates:	4 and 5 March 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel a strong sense of belonging to this inclusive, community school. They are proud of their school. The school's vision of 'believe and achieve' permeates school life. Staff support passionately the development of pupils' character. As a result, pupils believe in themselves and in others. They demonstrate this through the kindness they show each other and how they take on responsibilities as part of normal school routines. For example, pupils who are finding things difficult have older 'buddies' to provide help for them. The school's nurturing environment means that pupils feel safe and happy.

The school is ambitious for pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Reading is of the highest priority and staff build children's communication and language skills from the start. Along with a well-thought-out curriculum, this helps to develop pupils' knowledge and confidence. Overall, pupils achieve well.

Beginning in the Reception Year, staff have high expectations for behaviour. Pupils behave well in classrooms. This helps staff to maximise learning time. Pupils are articulate and welcome visitors into the school with smiles, kind words and gestures, such as holding doors open and asking how their day is going.

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

The school's ambitious curriculum sets out clearly what pupils should learn from Reception to the end of Year 6. The school trains staff to develop the expertise to teach the curriculum well. In most lessons, staff set out learning in well considered and clearly explained steps. This helps pupils develop a secure understanding of the information that they need to know. For example, in music, pupils demonstrate their knowledge of rhythm and drum technique. They are able to reflect independently and improve their performance. However, occasionally, teachers do not use what they know about pupils' prior learning to ensure that activities build on what they already know and can do. When this happens, pupils struggle to make connections in their learning and their knowledge is less secure.

Pupils read a wide variety of high-quality books. The school ensures pupils are exposed to different genres and cultures within the well-stocked classroom libraries. Pupil 'diversity ambassadors' ensure books feature the range of cultures and diversity that reflect modern Britain diligently. Phonics teaching starts as soon as children arrive in Reception. Staff teach phonics well, as a result of the training they have received. This means that most pupils become fluent and confident readers in key stage 1. Staff identify quickly those pupils who are struggling to keep up. These pupils get the support that they need to help them improve their reading.

The clear systems in place help to identify early SEND need quickly and accurately. Through the tailored support they receive, pupils with SEND achieve well and are integrated fully into school life. This includes high participation in the wider curriculum offer.

Children in early years settle into school quickly. Clear routines help them to be well prepared for their future learning. Children learn and play together and develop social skills, such as sharing and waiting their turn.

The school's high attendance reflects pupils' positive attitudes to learning and their happiness to be in school. While attendance is strong, the school continues to explore ways to improve this further. This includes the use of personalised plans for some pupils.

The school's provision for developing character is exceptional. Pupils develop a sophisticated awareness of diversity and difference. Diversity ambassadors make informed decisions about improving inclusivity and awareness of others' needs across the school. This includes school council leading assemblies on topics, such as hidden disabilities. One pupil reflected the views of many by saying 'equality is when everything is fair, equity makes things fair for those that need some help'.

Pupils revel in the wide variety of opportunities to develop their talents and interests. An extensive range of clubs give pupils the chance to try new things, such as archery, cheerleading, coding and musical theatre. Pupils recall the memorable visits and visitors to school, which support their learning very effectively.

The school council makes positive changes to pupils' experiences in the school. They use their dedicated budget to do this. One example of their use of funds has been to add additional games markings on the playground. This has provided more options for pupils at social times.

The school engages effectively with staff, who are proud to work at the school. Leaders develop staff through useful training opportunities and consider their workload carefully, which staff appreciate highly. Governors know the school well and check on improvements. They hold leaders to account for the quality of the education they provide.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Sometimes, staff do not use what they know about pupils' prior learning carefully enough to ensure activities build on what they know and can do. On these occasions, pupils do not build their knowledge as well as they could. The school should ensure that staff use activities that help pupils to build and consolidate their knowledge consistently over time.

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	117490
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10345210
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	415
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	David Munchin
Headteacher	Stuart Whiteland
Website	www.welwynst-marys.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	24 and 25 September 2013 under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The current headteacher took up post in September 2023.
- The school is a Church of England School in the Diocese of St Albans. The most recent section 48 inspection for schools of a religious character took place in March 2019.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- 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. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science, history and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors 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.
- Inspectors also visited some lessons in other curriculum subjects.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other leaders, including the special educational needs coordinator.
- The inspectors met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair. They also spoke to the school effectiveness advisor and a diocesan representative.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: 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.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Wayne Jarvis, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Sarah Merritt	Ofsted Inspector
Amy Luu	Ofsted Inspector

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