

Inspection of a good school: Mark Cross Church of England Aided Primary School

Mark Cross, Crowborough, East Sussex TN6 3PJ

Inspection date:

16 April 2024

Outcome

Mark Cross Church of England Aided Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love this school. They happily join their classmates in the morning, ready for the day ahead. The youngest children in the school delight in learning and enjoy school just as much as the older pupils. Parents share their children's enthusiasm. They talk of friendly staff, strong communication, and effective support when their children need some extra help. Staff have high expectations. They build warm relationships with their pupils, who feel secure and valued as a result. Pupils work hard, explain their learning confidently and achieve well. They share their teachers' high aspirations for them in the future.

Pupils enjoy getting to know each other in this small, friendly school. They say that everyone is kind and welcoming and that teachers are fair. Any worries they have are sorted out quickly. The school's values provide a secure framework for school life and pupils know why these are important. For instance, they can explain the importance of treating each other with respect. Pupils know and follow the school rules. They work well together in lessons and chat and play sensibly during breaktimes. The school's stunning rural setting, and its bright, attractive and well-equipped classrooms, provides pupils with an inviting and interesting place in which to learn.

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

The school has worked hard to update the curriculum in the past two years. This has been a significant piece of work, but well worthwhile. Leaders have rightly prioritised curriculum development in reading, English and mathematics, as well as in some of the foundation subjects. The revised curriculum in these subjects provides pupils with much more cohesive and coherent learning than was the case previously. Pupils achieve well in these subjects as a result. The youngest children in the school are excited about learning.

The curriculum is at an earlier stage of development in a small number of foundation subjects, such as history. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Further work is needed to ensure that the content of the curriculum in these subjects is as carefully identified as it is in others. Teachers are pleased with improvements made to the

curriculum. One said, 'This is the first time we feel that the curriculum is in the right place, although we know that there's more to do.'

Leaders ensure that all pupils benefit from the education provided by the school. Disadvantaged pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are valued members of the school community and participate fully in all aspects of school life. Leaders are alert to their needs and provide effective support wherever needed.

Leaders have strengthened the school's approach to teaching reading in recent years. A new phonics programme introduced last year is now securely embedded. Staff teach the programme consistently well and pupils acquire secure and reliable reading skills. Regular assessments are used to check that pupils are on track with their reading, with support provided where needed. In 2023, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in the national tests was in line with the national average, while the proportion achieving the higher standard was above. Books are given a high priority in the school's revised curriculum. Key texts have been chosen with great care and opportunities for pupils to read are threaded throughout the curriculum. Pupils enjoy the range of books that they can read in school or at home.

The school's Christian ethos is central to school life. Class assemblies are used to promote the school's values and to explain how these relate to fundamental British values. Sports premium funding supports the provision of a wide range of clubs and activities. Trips and visits help to inform pupils' views of the world.

Pupils behave well. They learn about their own emotions and the impact these can have on their actions. Those who struggle to behave appropriately are supported with kindness and understanding. Staff know pupils very well, so they are quick to spot signs of anxiety and intervene early where necessary. Children in Reception class copy the strong role models provided by their teachers. They are confident and happy, treating each other with respect, listening to each other politely and cooperating beautifully with each other to complete activities.

Staff share their pupils' enthusiasm for school. One said, 'Everyone makes it a place that you want to be, and everyone always has time for you.' Leaders are alert to workload pressures and staff appreciate some of the steps taken to support their work, such as opportunities to share expertise with colleagues in other schools in the federation.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a minority of foundation subjects, such as history, the school has not identified the knowledge and key concepts pupils will learn precisely enough. Sometimes, there is too much content for pupils to learn and too few opportunities for them to develop depth of learning. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they could in these subjects. Leaders should implement their plans to refine the curriculum. Additionally, leaders should ensure that staff have the necessary expertise and knowledge to implement the curriculum in these subjects effectively and in the way that leaders intend.

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 January 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	114558
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10321801
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	91
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Emma Harrison
Headteacher	Alma Scales (Head of School) Joanna Challis (Acting Executive Headteacher)
Website	www.markcrossce.e-sussex.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	16 and 17 January 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Mark Cross Church of England Aided Primary School is part of The Weald Federation. The federation was formed in September 2019, when the Aspire Federation and the Saxonbury Federation amalgamated. The federation consists of four schools, led by two acting executive headteachers and governed by one shared governing body.
- The school has a Christian ethos. It is located in the Diocese of Chichester. Its last section 48 inspection took place in January 2020.
- The head of school was appointed in September 2022.

Information about this inspection

- 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.
- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- Inspectors met with the head of school, the acting executive headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met with four governors, including the chair of governors. She also had a telephone conversation with a local authority representative and a diocesan representative.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection. They also considered the views of staff expressed in Ofsted's survey.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and history. Deep dives included visits to lessons, a review of pupils' work and discussions with leaders, teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and at other times of the school day. They gathered parents' views through Ofsted's survey and spoke with parents at the start of the school day.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sue Cox

His Majesty's Inspector

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