

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Northill CofE Academy

Bedford Road, Northill, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire SG18 9AH

Inspection date:

19 November 2024

Outcome

Northill CofE Academy has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The executive headteacher of this school is Victoria Morrall. This school is part of the Diocese of St Albans Multi-Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Anna Rogers, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jenny Jenkins.

What is it like to attend this school?

Northill is a small school, which fosters a warm and welcoming atmosphere for all pupils. It is a happy and nurturing place in which to learn. The school knows pupils really well and wants the best for them. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils are proud of their school. Most attend every day and show a willingness to succeed. Pupils work hard to meet the school's high expectations for their learning.

There have been many changes to leadership and staff in recent years. This has concerned some parents and carers. The school has developed strong and trusting relationships with pupils and their families. Pupils feel safe at school. They know that adults care for them and will help if there is a problem.

Classrooms are calm and purposeful. Pupils listen to their teachers attentively and settle to tasks quickly. They are confident, happy to participate in learning and extremely polite to adults and visitors.

Pupils have a strong understanding of the school values of safe, ready, respectful. They explain how these help them to try their best and listen to adults.

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

The school has designed a broad and balanced curriculum across a range of subjects. The curriculum matches the expectations of the national curriculum. The knowledge pupils learn and the order in which they learn it is carefully considered and set out clearly.

Teachers explain new ideas and knowledge thoughtfully and clearly. They model learning which helps pupils grasp new concepts quickly. Pupils remember the important knowledge they have learned. The school has identified that some subject areas are not yet ambitious enough. In these subjects, pupils do not always produce work that accurately reflects their depth of knowledge. The school are reviewing the curriculum for these subjects.

The school has a clear understanding of pupils' individual needs and any gaps in their learning. Learning is adapted so all pupils, including those with SEND, have full access to lessons and learn well. Any misconceptions are picked up quickly and pupils learn from these.

The school wants all pupils to become confident and fluent readers. There are a wealth of interesting books that motivate pupils to read widely. Staff are skilled and teach phonics effectively. Children in the early years learn to read as soon as they start school. They match sounds to letters and use this knowledge to write simple words. Pupils in key stage 1 build on this knowledge. They use strategies they have learned to help them to read unfamiliar words. Staff read with pupils frequently and provide support quickly to help them keep up. Occasionally, pupils read books that do not closely match the sounds they know. In these cases, pupils struggle to read accurately and fluently. Leaders are aware of this and are taking steps to put this right.

Pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged are included in all aspects of school life. There are clear systems for swiftly identifying pupils who need additional support. Provision for these pupils is a strength of the school. Careful adaptations help these pupils to access the same learning as their peers. As a result, these pupils make progress from their starting points.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe when online and when cycling or walking to school. They enjoy learning about different people, places and communities. They understand how everyone should be treated with respect. Pupils learn about life in modern Britain through a range of visits, visitors and trips. They understand about democracy and the need for laws.

The school works hard to create opportunities for pupils to gain broader experiences. For example, by joining with another school for a residential trip. This helps pupils from this small school prepare for transition to secondary school. There are a wide variety of clubs that are available to pupils. Many of these are as a result of pupils' interests. For example, archery club was a suggestion from pupils. Other clubs on offer include cricket, choir, science and technology.

In this small school, staff work together closely and support each other's workload at busier times of year. Governors and the trust play a key role in supporting the school. They are well informed about the work of the school, including its strengths and areas for development. They pay close attention to staff well-being. Staff are proud to work at this school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils read books that are not matched closely enough to their phonics knowledge. They attempt to read words that contain sounds they do not know securely. This limits the rate at which these pupils become confident and fluent readers. The school should ensure that the books pupils read closely match the sounds they know. This will enable the weakest readers to catch up as quickly as they should.
- Some curriculum subjects are currently under review. In these subjects, teachers do not have a shared understanding about the standard of work they should expect pupils to produce. Some pupils' work is not of a high quality. The school should continue to provide support and guidance so that staff have equally high expectations of pupils in all subjects.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 predecessor school, Northill CofE VA Lower School, to be good for overall effectiveness in November 2014.

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	148411
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10345536
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 10
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	59
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jenny Jenkins
CEO of the trust	Anna Rogers
Headteacher	Victoria Morrall (executive headteacher)
Website	www.northillschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Diocese of St Albans Multi-Academy Trust.
- The executive headteacher has responsibility for this school and one other in the same trust.
- The school is expanding from a lower school to a primary school and currently has classes from Reception to Year 5. The school manages a breakfast and after-school club provision.
- The school is part of the Diocese of St Albans. The school's last inspection for schools of a religious character, under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, was conducted in January 2023. The next section 48 inspection will take place within eight school years.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of the 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.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff, pupils and parents; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. They also heard pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors spoke with the executive headteacher and deputy headteacher, who is also the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator.
- Inspectors met with teachers and other staff to talk about the curriculum, workload and the behaviour and personal development of pupils.
- Inspectors met with members of the local governing board and some trustees, including the chair of the trust.
- Inspectors considered a range of documents, including the school's plans for improvement and minutes of meetings of the local governing board.
- Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils during lessons, around the school and on the playground. They looked at behaviour and attendance records and considered leaders' analysis of these.
- Inspectors considered the online responses to Ofsted Parent View, including any free-text comments. They also considered responses to Ofsted's online questionnaires for staff and pupils. Inspectors also spoke with some parents at the beginning of the school day.

Inspection team

Karen Stanton, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Peter Petrou

Ofsted Inspector

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