

Inspection of Pulford CofE VA Lower School

Pulford Road, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 1AB

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 November 2023

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	Outstanding

This school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education act 2005 13 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school values of faith, hope and love permeate the school and underpin everything it does. Pupils see the school as a family that they are all part of. Anyone new to the school gets a warm welcome and quickly feels part of the 'family'. Pupils are kind and supportive towards each other.

Pupils work hard to meet the staff's high expectations for them to achieve well. They enjoy explaining what they are doing and discussing this with each other and adults. Pupils thrive on people asking them questions about what they are doing so that they can explore their thinking even further. This enables pupils to make progress with their learning so that they are ready for middle school.

Pupils regularly learn outdoors. This helps to develop their resilience, imagination and understanding of nature. The environment is important to pupils. They have an eco-council so they can explore how they can improve their school environment. Pupils can also take on roles such as faith leaders and school councillors, which helps them to develop their confidence and bring about changes within the school.

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

Pupils study a curriculum that gives them a broad foundation of knowledge. In many subjects, the school has carefully identified the knowledge that pupils should learn. This is organised so that pupils can build on their knowledge and their skills over time. Staff have strong subject knowledge. The discussions and questioning that teachers choose ensure that they challenge pupils to think around the subject. Staff constantly check how much pupils can remember and do. Staff put in support that pupils need quickly to ensure that they can keep up with their class. Pupils, therefore, usually progress well.

In a few subjects, teachers do not know and use the precise knowledge and vocabulary that the pupils have previously learned. Consequently, pupils are not making as much progress in these subjects.

The school is ambitious for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff are well trained to be able to identify pupils' needs as soon as possible. This enables staff to make adaptations or seek external support quickly. Staff know pupils' needs well. This enables teachers to adapt the curriculum to meet pupils' needs. This ensures that most pupils with SEND achieve well.

The school has carefully chosen the phonics scheme to ensure that it is suitable for the pupils that attend the school. Children start to learn to read from the early years. Parents are well supported to read with their children and have access to resources to enable them to do this. Staff have been well trained to teach phonics effectively. They check pupils' knowledge frequently. They give extra help to stop pupils from falling behind. This ensures there is a consistent approach that helps pupils to become confident, fluent readers.

Pupils can access a range of texts from different cultures and topics from the well-stocked school and class libraries. Staff introduce pupils to new authors and different genres through story time and reading sessions in lessons. This helps pupils to enjoy reading.

Behaviour around the school is generally calm as pupils are respectful of each other and adults. Pupils know what is expected of them. They understand rules, routines and the reasons for them. This starts in the early years. Pupils learn that everyone is different. This helps them to be accepting and respectful to others.

There is a thorough and detailed curriculum to help pupils develop an understanding of the world around them. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe and healthy. The faith trip allows pupils to explore the similarities and differences of other religions and prepares them for future life. The school helps pupils develop independence. One way they achieve this is through the Year 4 residential visit.

The school is mindful of the staff's workload and well-being and considers this when introducing new things. Everyone appreciates the 'family feel' that the school has, including the governors. Governors know the school well due to their active involvement. This ensures that the school continues to move forward towards achieving its vision.

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 few subjects, the vocabulary and knowledge that pupils have previously been taught are not used by teachers. Therefore, teachers do not use accurate vocabulary and knowledge to help pupils to build effectively on their previous learning. The school must ensure that, in all subjects, the vocabulary and knowledge that pupils have previously learned are clearly identified so that teachers can ensure that pupils consolidate and build effectively on what they have learned previously.

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	109619
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10288423
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	2 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	261
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Edward Price
Headteacher	David Heather
Website	www.pulfordschool.org
Dates of previous inspection	30 November and 1 December 2010

Information about this school

- The school has provision for two-year-old children.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school has a Christian religious character. The most recent statutory inspection of its religious character, under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, took place in February 2016. The next section 48 inspection is due on 9 November 2023.

Information about this inspection

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

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

- The lead inspector spoke with governors from the governing body, a local authority representative and the Director of Education for the Diocese of St Albans.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in: early reading; mathematics; history; computing; and science. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of work.
- 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 gathered the views of pupils by speaking to them during lessons, in the dining hall and at breaktimes. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of staff, to gather their views of the school. Thirty-seven responses to Ofsted's staff survey were also considered.
- The inspectors considered 131 responses, including free-text responses, to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They spoke to parents at the school gate and considered correspondence sent directly to the inspection team.

Inspection team

Katie Devenport, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Conor Heaven

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