

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Heighington Church of England Primary School

Hopelands, Heighington, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham DL5 6PH

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 February 2025

Outcome

Heighington Church of England Primary School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Carly Stonier. This school is part of the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning 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), Paul Rickeard, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Taylor.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish at this school. From early years onwards, children learn to be kind, caring, respectful and forgiving to others. They develop their confidence as they progress through the school. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are well prepared for their next steps.

Pupils work hard during lessons and participate exceptionally well. They are interested in the tasks teachers set for them and take great pride in their work. Their attitudes to school life are excellent. Pupils are punctual to school and attend very regularly.

Pupils embody the school's vision by living 'life in its fullness'. They enjoy playing and learning together. Parents and carers say, 'Children develop a range of skills needed for life outside school.' The school has exceptionally high expectations of pupils' academic and personal success. Consequently, pupils' outcomes are above average, especially in reading.

Pupils have a very strong sense of equality. They are adamant that everyone should be treated equally no matter what they look like or where they come from.

The vast majority of parents are very positive about the school. They say staff are 'amazing', children thrive at school and the school contributes strongly to the community.

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

The school's high ambition for pupils is reflected in the aspirational curriculum that pupils enjoy. Much thought has gone into designing a curriculum that is carefully sequenced from early years to Year 6. This allows pupils to build on what they already know. Disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND follow the same curriculum as others because the school identifies their needs particularly well. Staff provide these pupils with very effective support.

Staff are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. They put the curriculum in place very well. Their explanations are clear and tasks are designed to meet the needs of all pupils. As a result, pupils remember their learning well and use previous learning to build on current work. On occasions, in some subjects, pupils are not moved on to more complex learning when they are ready to do so. This means that sometimes pupils' understanding is not as deep as it could be.

Reading sits at the heart of the school's work. Well-trained staff deliver the phonics and reading programme exceptionally well. Staff provide skilful support for pupils who find reading difficult, to help them catch up quickly. Staff help pupils become confident, fluent readers. The school immerses pupils in a broad range of high-quality texts that pupils enjoy. Pupils read regularly at home, selecting from a range of books in the 'book boxes' organised by the 'creative crew'.

From early years to Year 6, pupils' writing is closely linked to reading. Staff teach children in Reception to form letters accurately and use their phonics knowledge to spell correctly. This excellent start in early years helps pupils to develop impressive handwriting across the school. Staff use interesting texts to stimulate pupils' imagination and guide pupils to write at length for a variety of purposes. Pupils in key stage 1 enjoy sharing their poetry and using high-quality vocabulary. Older pupils use reading books to 'magpie' vocabulary to create high-quality written work.

In Nursery and Reception, children cooperate very well with adults and each other. Parents are grateful for the support to help their children settle smoothly into school. Children play well together and thrive with many opportunities to develop their vocabulary. There are exciting opportunities for learning. For example, Reception pupils enjoy digging in the sandpit to find bones, which they then count and measure to develop their mathematical knowledge. Learning in early years is exceptionally well planned.

Pupils learn in an environment where there is respect for all. They develop a keen awareness of the importance of fundamental British values. Pupils learn about diversity among people and families. Pupils contribute well to the life of the school and the community by taking on a wide range of leadership roles. They are very clear about how to stay safe and understand the importance of mental health. The school goes the extra

mile to make sure all pupils, including pupils with SEND and those who need support with behaviour, are safe and take part in all aspects of school life.

The trust, the academy council and school leaders work together to ensure the school is the best it can be. Staff are proud of the school and say that leaders take their workload and well-being into account. Pastoral care is a strength for both staff and pupils.

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, assessment is not used precisely by staff to move pupils on to more challenging tasks when knowledge has been consolidated. This means that some pupils are not progressing to more complex areas of the curriculum to develop a greater understanding of these subjects. Leaders should work with staff to enable pupils to move on when they are ready for more complex areas of the curriculum.

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 school to be good for overall effectiveness in December 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	137022
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10346418
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	256
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Taylor
CEO of the trust	Paul Rickeard
Headteacher	Carly Stonier
Website	www.heighingtonceprimary.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	10 and 11 December 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a Church of England school in the Diocese of Durham. Its next section 48 inspection is expected to take place before the end of the spring term 2026.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school opened nursery provision for three-year-olds at the start of the autumn term 2024. This has increased the number of pupils on the school roll.

Information about this inspection

- 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. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.

- The inspector met with leaders and held a discussion with the chair of the trust board and the chair of the academy council. The inspector held a discussion with the chief education officer for the trust and a diocesan representative.
- The inspector visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: 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.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour throughout the day. He spoke to pupils about their views on behaviour in school. The inspector considered how the school supports pupils' personal development.
- The inspector spoke with a number of parents at start and end of the school day. He analysed responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. The inspector also considered the responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey and staff survey.

Inspection team

Jim McGrath, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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