

Inspection of a good school: Helsby Hillside Primary School

Bates Lane, Helsby, Frodsham, Cheshire WA6 9LN

Inspection dates:

24 and 25 November 2021

Outcome

Helsby Hillside Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enter the building eagerly and without a backward glance. They are keen to get on with all that the school day offers. Pupils told the inspector that they feel happy and safe. They are not burdened with fears about poor or unkind behaviour that might ruin their experience of school life.

Pupils have absolute trust in the school's staff. They are convinced that staff will deal with bullying effectively. Pupils know that they will be listened to and believed. They particularly appreciate the opportunity to share their feelings with staff when their lives have taken a turn for the worse.

Leaders and teachers want the best for pupils. They expect pupils to work hard, behave sensibly and be kind to others. Pupils do their best to realise these aspirations. They learn to avoid stereotyping people because they may come from a different family unit, religion or culture. One pupil summed this up nicely by saying: 'We don't judge a book by its cover. We find out about the person inside.'

Pupils blossom as they take on extra responsibilities, such as being a buddy to children in early years. The newly appointed reading ambassadors cannot wait to start spreading the joy of reading among their fellow pupils.

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

Despite the many challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders and teachers have successfully designed and implemented an ambitious curriculum. This curriculum meets the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It rouses pupils' interest and makes their time at school purposeful and enjoyable.

Pupils achieve well. They gain knowledge across a wide range of subjects in a logical order. They deepen their learning over time. For example, Year 6 pupils confidently tackle complex calculations involving fractions because their earlier learning of this topic is secure. The time that children spend in early years sets them up well. The curriculum in the Reception class pays close attention to building the foundations for future success. Effective identification of the specific needs of pupils with SEND ensures that these pupils receive the support that they need. Leaders and teachers expect pupils with SEND to access the same broad curriculum as others in the school.

Leaders have spent time identifying the important knowledge that pupils should gain by the end of each topic. Even so, the outcome of this work is more effective in some subjects than in others. At times, too much emphasis is placed on the tasks that pupils will complete rather than what they will know. This reduces teachers' certainty that pupils have gained the key building blocks for future learning.

Teachers have the skills to deliver the curriculum well. Their well-honed subject knowledge means that they choose appropriate activities to help pupils to grapple with new subject content. Teachers recap learning often to help pupils remember what they have been taught. In English and mathematics, they check pupils' understanding and seek to iron out any muddled thinking. However, the systems to assess what pupils have learned are less secure in other subjects. This hampers teachers from picking up on gaps in pupils' knowledge. At times, this slows pupils' progress through the curriculum.

Reading is at the forefront of the school's curriculum. Children in the Reception class quickly become competent early readers due to the careful manner in which adults introduce letters and the sounds that they represent. Well-trained staff ensure that pupils in key stage 1 build on this strong start. Support for pupils who struggle to read, in conjunction with the use of carefully selected reading books, mean that pupils read fluently and with understanding. Older pupils are avid readers, often selecting and enjoying books with mature themes and plots. It is quite common to see them automatically reach for their reading book whenever they have a spare minute or two in class.

Children in the Reception class set the bar high for conduct in lessons and around the school. They listen attentively, follow routines and remain engrossed in their learning. In other classes, pupils' positive behaviour rarely wanes, whether they are at work or at play.

Pupils develop a firm understanding of, and respect for, the differences between people in modern society. They enjoy a wide range of after-school activities that meet their interests. Opportunities to welcome visitors into school, to visit places of interest and to take part in residential trips enhance pupils' personal development. Pupils leave Helsby Hillside as well-rounded youngsters, ready to take their place in the world.

Staff appreciate the support that they receive from leaders and their colleagues. They value the team spirit that allows them to celebrate success or ask for help. They trust leaders to find smarter ways of working so that staff's well-being is considered and promoted.

Members of the governing body are keen advocates for the school. They applaud its many strengths. Through their developing links with subject leaders, they are gaining a greater insight into the education that pupils experience.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff, regardless of their role in school, have been suitably trained to pick up on any changes in pupils' behaviour, or their physical appearance, that might be linked to harm. They understand the procedures to follow to register their concerns. Leaders keep appropriate records of any worries about a pupil's safety, alongside incidents of poor behaviour, including bullying. They use this information as they should to refer their concerns to external agencies. This ensures that pupils and their families get the support that they need. However, the systems for analysing this information are not meticulous enough. This stops leaders from quickly identifying patterns or more widespread concerns.

Pupils are taught to keep themselves healthy and safe. They know the risks of online activity and the dangers of smoking and of misusing alcohol. They understand the need for personal space and how to report their worries if someone behaves in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some curriculum areas, it is unclear what leaders consider to be the most important knowledge that pupils should learn. Too much weight is given to the tasks that pupils complete rather than what they should know in order to be successful in their future learning. This hampers teachers from making sure that pupils' knowledge is fully secure before the topic ends. Leaders should revisit the end-points that they have identified for each unit of work. They should ensure that these end-points link more closely to what they want pupils to know, understand and remember.
- The assessment systems to check on pupils' understanding in subjects other than English and mathematics are underdeveloped. On occasions, this stops teachers from being certain that pupils have gained the knowledge that they should. It slows pupils' smooth progress across the subject. Leaders should decide on the assessment procedures that fit with the planned curriculum. They should also ensure that teachers are suitably equipped to use the new systems with confidence and accuracy, so that gaps in pupils' learning are identified and tackled swiftly.
- The system for analysing concerns about pupils' safety or any incidents of poor behaviour, such as bullying, are not as robust as they might be. The current system does not help leaders to identify quickly and effectively patterns over time. Leaders, including governors, should review their approach to gathering information about pupils' safety and behaviour. This is so that they can gain a swifter and greater insight into any wider concerns about the pupils in their care.

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 a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 2016.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	111004
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10204410
Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	209
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Louise Midwinter
Headteacher	Adam Khan
Website	www.helsbyhillside.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	4 and 5 October 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A new headteacher has been appointed since the previous inspection.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and has taken that into account in her evaluation.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspector met with subject leaders, reviewed curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, looked at a sample of pupils' work, spoke to teachers and talked to pupils about their learning. The inspector also observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspector also met with leaders of other subjects and considered the curriculum plans for these areas.

- The inspector met with the headteacher and other leaders. She spoke with seven members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and held a telephone discussion with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector spoke to pupils about their views of the school and observed their behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- The inspector considered a range of documentation shared by school leaders or made available on the website, including the school development plan. She checked the arrangements for keeping pupils safe through a review of documentation and discussions with leaders, governors, pupils and staff.
- The inspector considered the views shared by parents and carers through Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. This included the free-text comments. She also spoke with a group of parents at the start of the school day. The inspector took account of the staff and pupil online surveys.

Inspection team

Jo Olsson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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