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

Rickling Green, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 3YG

Inspection date: 12 November 2024

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils learn to embody the school values through love, respect, responsibility, positivity and embracing their individuality. For example, as 'courageous ambassadors', they educate the school community about the lives of others. They raise funds for local, national and global charities through food drives, bake sales and virtual art auctions. By learning to help others, pupils feel more comfortable seeking help when they need it. This allows the school to address issues quickly and helps to keep pupils safe.

The 'super seven rules' reinforce a culture of respect and responsibility. Older pupils, for instance, guide younger ones during the 'book swap', recommending age-appropriate books to enjoy at home. Older pupils looking after younger ones is a positive feature of the school. It helps children settle quickly when they join the Reception Year.

High expectations at school support pupils' growth both educationally and personally. A broad curriculum and activities such as the 'expert showcase', where pupils share their learning with parents and carers, foster pride and accomplishment. These expectations are evident in pupils' regular attendance and the high achievement of many by the end of Year 6. Combined with a wide range of extra-curricular activities, these factors prepare pupils well for the challenges of secondary school.

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

The school has strengthened its curriculum. Leaders encourage staff to share ideas and good practices within the federation and with a local school. This supports more consistent and effective teaching. Staff feel valued as leaders prioritise their training.

Although staff in this small school sometimes take on extra tasks, they do so willingly. They benefit from the strong teamwork and support fostered by leaders.

The school is working to improve writing provision, although development is in its early stages. There is currently a mismatch between some writing tasks and pupils' phonics knowledge. This occasionally results in errors that go uncorrected. Consequently, some older pupils continue to face challenges with writing due to unaddressed mistakes.

The school is dedicated to helping pupils develop strong reading skills, especially those who are starting to read or need extra support. The school has a rigorous phonics programme that caters for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff focus on helping pupils improve by regularly checking their phonics knowledge. They teach them how to sound out and blend letters to read words. Pupils read books and take part in class discussions to grow their vocabulary and understanding. As a result, many pupils achieve highly in reading by the end of Year 6.

The school has well-established systems to identify and address the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND. Governors use their expertise to help leaders review these systems, ensuring that they are clear and efficient. For example, parents receive detailed plans showing the extra help their child receives each day. The new 'Let's talk SEND' forum also allows parents to connect, share advice and learn about local activities for children with SEND. Nonetheless, writing remains a challenge for some pupils with SEND. While daily spelling practice is helpful, some still struggle to organise their ideas and write clear sentences.

There are clear rules and a structured approach to addressing inappropriate behaviour. Staff maintain generally calm and focused classrooms. On the rare occasion it is needed, leaders step in to assess the situation and determine the best course of action. This allows behavioural issues to be resolved swiftly. Leaders communicate openly with pupils, pupils' parents and the staff. This ensures that effective collaboration supports positive relationships.

The school promotes pupils' personal development by integrating life skills into the curriculum. Activities, such as road safety training, bike riding and water safety lessons, alongside workshops that engage parents, help to keep pupils safe. Events such as 'Safer Internet Day' ensure that pupils are equipped to navigate the digital world safely. The 'Conquering Rickling' initiative helps pupils understand core values through activities, such as caring for plants, assisting with household tasks and participating in cross-school competitions, for example hockey. Educational visits further enrich pupils' learning, complementing what they study in class.

Many parents value the school's close-knit community. They enjoy opportunities to celebrate achievements and join local events, such as 'RunFest', where families participate in long-distance runs. Such activities strengthen the bond between the school and the wider community.

The governing body understands its roles and responsibilities. It sets strategy effectively and holds the school to account. Its proactive approach includes addressing immediate needs, for example, reviewing funding for outdoor learning resources in the early years. Regular visits, ongoing training and a focus on safeguarding ensure that governors stay informed. They promote a culture of transparency and collaboration.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A small number of pupils, including some pupils with SEND, find writing a challenge. The support they need is not yet fully in place, including in the early years. As a result, these pupils find it hard to write accurately and with confidence, which affects their progress. The school should focus on improving writing support across all subjects to ensure that every pupil develops confidence and skill over time.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in October 2015.

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	115130
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10338964
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	96
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Helen Christensen & Richard Ward (Co-chairs)
Headteacher	Tracey Bratley
Website	www.federationfarnhamrickling.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 February 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Diocese of Chelmsford. The school has a religious character, Church of England, and was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005 on 4 July 2019. The school's next section 48 inspection will be within eight school years of that date.
- The school is part of the Federation of Farnham and Rickling C of E, which includes this school and Farnham Church of England Primary School. The schools share a headteacher and a governing body.
- The headteacher, who took up the post in September 2022, works in an executive capacity across the schools in the federation and one other local primary school.
- The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provision.
- There is a separately registered and inspected out-of-school daycare on site for children aged four to 11 years.

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. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator, four governors and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and their wider school experience and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- 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.
- Inspectors reviewed various documents, including the school development plan and minutes from a full governing body meeting. They also considered responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Aimee Bray	Ofsted Inspector

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