

Inspection of a good school: Stonehill School

Western Close, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire SG6 4SZ

Inspection dates:

11 and 12 July 2023

Outcome

Stonehill School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Stonehill provides pupils with a caring and nurturing environment. Each morning adults greet pupils as they arrive at school. They ensure that pupils are happy and ready to learn. The trusting relationships pupils share with adults help them to feel safe and well cared for.

Pupils describe their school as a 'friendly place' and being 'part of a family'. Classrooms are busy places of learning. Pupils know that teachers expect them to work hard. They are attentive and always eager to learn and find out more. If at any time they are anxious, they can visit the 'rainbow room', where adults will help them to settle and to feel calm.

Everyone gets along together. Any occasional disputes between pupils are quickly resolved independently or with adults. Pupils use 'voice boxes' to share any concerns. They know who to ask if they have any worries and are confident that adults will help them. They know that bullying is rare at their school.

Pupils learn about different values each month. Becoming a 'Stonehill star' recognises how pupils show these values in school. Pupils enjoy visits and trips, especially ones that help them to learn about their local community. Year 6 pupils talk excitedly about their planned residential trip.

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

Leaders have made some recent changes to some of their curriculum programmes. Revised plans provide a greater focus for the specific skills that pupils need to learn in every subject. The key knowledge identifies how pupils build their understanding step by step. Leaders have not yet fully established these new plans. This means that while pupils recall facts, some do not make links to build learning. As a result, pupils do not develop a deep knowledge of the things that they learn in a few subjects.

Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They use this well to share and help pupils to understand important vocabulary. In the early years, for example, children used their mathematical resources to explain which numbers were odd or even.

Teachers make use of different ways to assess and check what pupils know. They probe pupils' understanding by questioning responses. This ensures that pupils develop a secure understanding of their learning. At certain points in lessons, teachers use 'destination questions'. This helps them to identify any misconceptions. Teachers address any errors in pupils' work quickly.

Leaders know that being able to read is the gateway to learning. They have established clear routines for the teaching of early reading. Children in the Nursery begin to learn about different stories and rhymes. In Reception and key stage 1, adults teach phonics consistently well. Any pupils who struggle receive extra support to help them to catch up. Older pupils enjoy reading texts from a wide range of genres and by a wide range of authors. They look forward to the quizzes that check their understanding when they have finished reading a book.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. Leaders identify pupils' needs quickly. They help teachers to change their plans to include every pupil in the lesson. Pupils with SEND enjoy working alongside their classmates. The help they receive means that they achieve well.

Pupils are positive about their learning. They behave well in class, listening intently to each other's ideas and opinions. Staff are quick to spot and praise pupils when they are 'caught' being responsible. Pupils' neatly presented books reflect a pride in their work.

Pupils understand what being different means. They are clear that it is important that everyone is treated equally. Leaders look to provide pupils with experiences of community involvement to develop ideas of citizenship. Pupils appreciate the clubs they attend. However, pupils' leadership skills are less well promoted. Some activities, such as school council meetings, have not occurred as frequently as leaders planned.

Governors have a clear picture of the work of the school. This includes checking staff's well-being. Staff welcome the support they receive from leaders. Morale is high.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities. They are well trained in the school procedures for recording any concerns, no matter how small. Staff know the signs of abuse they need to identify and report. Leaders act swiftly on these concerns. They work with a range of agencies to get the help that vulnerable pupils and families need.

Leaders make the appropriate checks to ensure that all adults are suitable to work with children. They ensure that pupils learn how to stay safe online and in the wider world.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders' refinements of a few subject plans are quite recent and not yet fully established. This means that not all pupils are building a deep knowledge of their learning in every subject. Leaders should continue to provide the support for teachers in delivering their plans effectively so that pupils' knowledge is secure across the curriculum.
- Leaders' plans for promoting pupils' wider development have not yet been fully realised since the pandemic began. Opportunities to develop pupils' strength of character through leadership roles have been limited. Leaders should continue to implement their plans so that pupils' personal development is fully supported and that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

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 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 in February 2018.

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](#)' 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	117345
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10288458
Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	John Millar
Headteacher	Elaine Close
Website	www.stonehill.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 to 21 February 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school manages a before-school breakfast club.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, groups of staff and five members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. The inspector also held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, looked at samples of pupils' work and spoke with pupils about their learning.

- The inspector listened to a sample of pupils read to an adult and spoke with a group of pupils about their reading.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documents, including information relating to safeguarding such as the single central record. Meetings were held with the designated leader of safeguarding to evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding.
- The inspector scrutinised school documents, including behaviour records, school improvement plans and the school's summary self-evaluation.
- The inspector took into account 74 responses from Ofsted's parent questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, as well as 73 free-text responses. The inspector also reviewed 25 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for school staff and 136 responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire. Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils as well as observing pupils' conduct in and out of their classes.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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