

Inspection of a good school: St Meryl School

The Mead, Carpenders Park, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD19 5BT

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 June 2021

Outcome

St Meryl School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at St Meryl are thoughtful, considerate, and respectful. They enjoy their learning across a wide range of subjects. Pupils listen carefully to one another's ideas and value each other's point of view. Pupils are regularly consulted about their experiences of school and how things could be improved. Adults take account of what pupils have to say. For example, older pupils told leaders that they missed being read to in class. Now teachers in all year groups read aloud to pupils every day. Pupils are learning to be confident, responsible citizens, who feel comfortable sharing their views.

Behaviour across the school is positive. There is a strong sense of caring for others and working together. This is evident in lessons, at break times and in the lunch hall. Pupils are encouraged to solve problems and think things through. Peer mediators help pupils resolve situations when they happen. Staff act promptly to deal with behaviour incidents when they occur.

Pupils know who to go to in school if they have any worries or concerns. Pupils say that bullying is rare in school. When it happens, it is dealt with and resolved. Pupils have been appointed as anti-bullying ambassadors. They have received training and are ready to take up their new roles.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They appreciate leaders' work to ensure that children feel happy, safe and secure.

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

Leaders ensure that all pupils experience a broad and rich curriculum. Curriculum plans are clearly structured across all subjects. This enables teachers to plan lessons that build on what pupils have learned before. Teachers adapt their plans and approaches to ensure that all pupils achieve well and make good progress in their learning. Teachers are well supported by experienced subject leaders. Teachers are given the guidance and support

they need to teach the curriculum in all subjects well.

Reading is a high priority across the school. Pupils talk about books with enthusiasm. They recognise that reading is important to help them learn new things in all subjects. Older pupils say that they enjoy reading in their spare time. Pupils make strong progress in reading.

Pupils start learning phonics from a very early age. The curriculum for phonics is carefully considered. Pupils' knowledge and use of phonics is secured through regular practice and repetition. Leaders and teachers recently reviewed the chosen reading scheme. Younger pupils are reading texts that closely match the phonics they are learning in school. Staff have observed that this is increasing pupils' confidence and enjoyment in reading.

Pupils read regularly at home and at school. In lessons, pupils develop the skills that enable them to gain a deeper understanding of the texts they read. As a result, older pupils are becoming fluent readers.

Pupils in key stage two who are not yet confident readers are given extra support. This support enables pupils to practise reading aloud, discuss texts in detail, and extend their vocabulary. However, these pupils are not consistently supported to apply their phonics knowledge to help them decode unfamiliar words in various contexts. This means that they are not catching up as quickly as they could. Leaders' plans to provide further training for phonics and reading for support staff have been delayed by the pandemic.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have reviewed the provision for mathematics in the early years and a new mathematics programme has been introduced throughout the school. This is supporting teachers to plan lessons that gradually build pupils' knowledge and fluency in mathematics. Pupils are supported to be successful in mathematics from the early years and onwards. They have regular opportunities to practise and apply what they have learned. Pupils can see how what they are learning in mathematics builds on what they have learned before. For example, pupils in Year 6 can talk about how their knowledge of coordinates and negative numbers is helping them translate shapes accurately.

Leaders have identified the important knowledge and skills that pupils should learn and know in each subject. This is helping pupils develop a deeper understanding of the subjects they are learning. Pupils are encouraged to reason and think for themselves at an early age. For example, in history, Year 1 pupils use evidence to work out what Earnest Shackleton's job might have been, based on the equipment he used. Year 3 pupils apply their knowledge of history and geography to describe the location and purpose of Hadrian's Wall. They can explain that Britain is a long way from Rome and how this would have been a factor in the Roman rule of Britain coming to an end. Leaders are exploring ways to develop the curriculum further, so that pupils understand the relevance of what they learn in each subject and how their learning connects.

Pupils have a wide range of opportunities for personal development. The school has achieved gold accreditation as a UNICEF Rights Respecting School. Pupils discuss, debate

and consider. Leaders are ambitious to develop a curriculum that strongly supports pupils' personal development.

Leaders and governors check on the implementation of the school's curriculum. Governors are effective in their role and are well informed. They provide appropriate challenge and support to school leaders. Governors ensure that the actions leaders are taking to improve the school are focused on the needs of pupils.

In discussion with the headteacher, we agreed that the extent to which the curriculum for each subject further enhances pupils' personal development may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff are vigilant. They know pupils well and are alert to pupils' individual needs. Leaders ensure that pupils know who they can speak to if they have worries or concerns. Leaders work effectively with other agencies to ensure that families get the help they need. Training for staff and for governors is regular, relevant and up to date. Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding is at the forefront of everybody's mind. Leaders work to raise awareness of safeguarding pupils in the real world and online with parents, pupils and staff

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is an effective curriculum in place for phonics and reading. Teachers who are new to the school are well supported so that they quickly adopt the school's approach to teaching phonics. Leaders' plans to provide further training for phonics and reading have been delayed by the pandemic. This is impacting on the effectiveness of support for weaker readers. Leaders should ensure that all staff receive regular training in phonics to maintain consistency and rigour in phonics teaching and reading support for pupils across the school.
- Leaders have been working to refine and enhance the school's curriculum in all subject areas. Curriculum plans are well sequenced in each subject area. Leaders should now consider how these curriculum plans can be further developed so that teaching in each subject contributes strongly to pupils' personal development and enables pupils to achieve exceptionally well in all areas of their learning.

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 some evidence that a good school could now be better than good, or that standards may be declining, 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 convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 7 and 8 December 2011.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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	117166
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10193994
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	223
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mrs Olga Cara
Headteacher	Craig Davies
Website	www.stmeryl.herts.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	24 November 2015, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- In April 2020 the deputy headteacher was appointed as the headteacher. This followed a term in which the deputy headteacher had been acting headteacher. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in April 2020 from within the school's leadership team.
- A new chair and a new vice-chair of governors were appointed in September 2019.

Information about this inspection

- During the inspection held meetings with the headteacher, and the deputy headteacher, who is also the leader for the early years. I also met with the leaders responsible for English, mathematics and history, and with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo), to discuss the quality of education in the school.
- I met with the office manager to review the single central record of pre-employment checks. I met with the headteacher as the designated person to discuss the school's arrangements for safeguarding.
- I met with 7 governors, including the chair of governors. I spoke with the Hertfordshire improvement partner (HIP) to discuss their work with school leaders.

- I reviewed a range of school documents, including the school development plan, curriculum plans and school policies.
- Reading, mathematics, and history were considered in detail to evaluate the quality of education. In each subject I carried out meetings with subject leaders, lesson visits, discussions with staff and pupils and looked at pupils' work.
- I reviewed the 64 responses that were submitted by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 34 free-text responses. I also considered the 26 responses to the staff survey and 20 responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Katherine Douglas, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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