

Benington Church of England Primary School

Walkern Road, Benington, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 7LP

Inspection dates

6–7 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since her appointment in 2017, the headteacher has set high expectations for the direction and educational achievement of pupils at the school.
- Leaders have created a culture of trust across the school. There is a strong team ethic committed to development and improvement. Consequently, staff morale is high.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development. They use their evaluations well to identify actions to improve the school.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good. Teachers use their subject knowledge well to plan exciting lessons and promote pupils' curiosity.
- Pupils behave well. The school's key values of generosity, compassion and courage permeate pupils' actions and relationships. This creates a strong sense of community across the school.
- Children make a good start to their education. They settle quickly because of the high expectations and well-established routines. Parents and carers are pleased with the provision and with the teaching children receive, which helps them make good progress.
- Safeguarding is effective because staff are vigilant in keeping pupils safe.
- Pupils enjoy reading and practise regularly to improve their fluency. They have access to high-quality texts, which is developing their range of vocabulary.
- Teachers are using their skills well to secure pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts. At times, the most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged in lessons.
- Pupils are enthusiastic writers. They receive good advice on how to improve their writing. However, handwriting skills are not taught systematically. This means that pupils' work is not consistently well presented.
- Benington's curriculum is well planned and offers exciting and engaging experiences for the pupils. However, the most able are not consistently challenged across the wider curriculum.
- The effectiveness of teaching assistants is too variable. Teachers do not always deploy them well to maximise the progress pupils make during the lesson.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers:
 - use teaching assistants consistently well to support learning in lessons
 - provide consistently challenging tasks for the most able pupils
 - plan activities across the wider curriculum that challenge the most able pupils
 - have consistently high expectations of pupils' handwriting to improve the presentation of their work across all subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher provides consistent and effective leadership. She has built a cohesive team who, together, share high aspirations that pupils achieve their best. Staff are proud to work at the school. They discuss new ideas together so that there is a shared understanding of the actions that are taken to improve the school.
- Leaders have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. Development plans are precise and identify appropriate actions to improve the school further. Leaders work together to check the success of their work against the targets they have set for themselves. Consequently, the quality of education has been sustained since the last inspection.
- Middle leaders make effective use of their knowledge and experience to coach and support teachers. High-quality professional development provided by leaders has supported teachers' confidence and their expertise to meet pupils' needs.
- Leaders make effective use of the school's tracking procedures to identify the progress pupils make. The information is used with teachers to target additional support. This means that the great majority of pupils are making good progress from their starting points, especially those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- The provision for supporting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is highly effective. The school has close links with the church. Pupils reflect on Christian values and how they impact upon their behaviour. Pupils are taught about other cultures and their faiths. The link with a school in India has fostered a better understanding of the lives led by children in different parts of the world. School councils, playground buddies and fundraising for different charities teach pupils about British values. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- The headteacher is determined that pupils have opportunities to participate in a range of extra-curricular clubs and activities. The sport premium is used well to employ sports coaches to develop pupils' skills in different games and activities. Pupils regularly participate in sporting competitions with other small schools. This helps to improve pupils' fitness and health.
- Leaders use the pupil premium well to address the needs of disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, these pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. It provides pupils with opportunities to develop a love of learning through well-targeted enrichment opportunities. For example, a topic about rainforests was made more exciting with a visit from reptiles and other exotic creatures. Teachers plan creatively to link different subjects to support pupils' deeper knowledge and skills. Trips are planned to help pupils apply what they have learned in the classroom to real-life contexts and situations. For example, pupils wrote authoritatively about the Globe Theatre and its place in Shakespearean society following their visit to London. However, teachers do not plan different tasks to challenge the most able pupils in a range of subjects across the curriculum.

- A large majority of parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted’s online questionnaire for parents, are supportive of the direction of the school. Those who spoke informally with the inspector are positive about the progress their children are making. A small minority of parents expressed concerns about the leadership and management. Inspection evidence does not support these concerns.

Governance of the school

- Governors are committed to the school’s success. They share the aspirations of the school’s leaders to provide the best education for its pupils. Governors know the school well. They use the information provided by leaders to check the progress being made so that improvement targets are achieved.
- Governors have a good understanding of the needs of small schools. They ensure that school finances and additional government funding are used well to support the progress of all groups of pupils.
- Governors ensure that their members have a range of skills and expertise to support the school. They make good use of external knowledge, such as the school’s chosen school improvement partner, to hold school leaders to account.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. The checks carried out on adults who work at the school are thorough and well organised. Leaders, including governors, ensure that the school meets the requirements for recruiting and appointing new employees. Staff are well trained and vigilant regarding the signs that children may be at risk.
- Systems for raising and reporting concerns are clear. Leaders regularly review their records. They check that there are no ongoing concerns where these have been raised previously. Records are kept securely and are well maintained.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe and can talk about this confidently. They recognise when their peers need help and they are supportive of one another. One pupil told the inspector that this was a good school because ‘We play nicely and never hurt each other.’
- All parents who responded to Ofsted’s questionnaire agreed that their children feel safe, happy and well looked after at the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers plan interesting lessons and actively engage pupils in their learning. They use their subject knowledge effectively. Teachers provide a clear sequence of learning that systematically develops pupils’ skills and understanding. For example, pupils were provided with activities to look at articles where viewpoints were expressed. They considered and identified the key features before writing their own persuasive letters about the rights of animals kept in zoos.

- Teachers use resources well, often as starting points to engage pupils' interests. This provides pupils with opportunities to form their own ideas and develop their understanding of the skills being taught. For example, in one science lesson, different objects were used to help pupils understand how different forces are exerted.
- Teachers use a range of different questions to find out what pupils know. They probe pupils' responses to check their understanding. Teachers use this information to identify where pupils require additional help. As a result, pupils quickly catch up and make good progress from their starting points.
- Science is taught effectively across the school. Teachers ensure that pupils use and understand scientific and technical vocabulary. Pupils conduct a range of scientific experiments that develop their skills of enquiry and investigation well. Links made with other subjects help to deepen pupils' knowledge of the world. For example, in a key stage 2 class, pupils made careful observations of the fibres in different materials when soaked in water. They found that materials contained a range of fibres, including plastics. This led to a conversation about the environment and how more thought should be given to the everyday objects we use.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved. Pupils work proficiently with place value and calculations and they develop a good level of mathematical fluency. Pupils are provided with tasks that make use of their mathematical skills to solve problems. Where teaching is better, teachers make good use of reasoning to deepen pupils' knowledge so that they are confident in tackling a wide range of mathematical concepts. Work in pupils' books shows that they are making strong gains in mathematics. However, not all teachers challenge the most able pupils consistently well..
- The teaching of higher-order reading skills is a strength. Leaders' decision to improve the range and quality of reading materials has raised expectations. Teachers use class texts well to develop pupils' vocabulary and that feeds into their writing. During reading lessons, teachers question pupils to infer meaning from their shared books. Regular individual reading sessions are developing pupils' fluency and stamina well. Younger pupils acquire phonics skills quickly. However, not all teachers are consistently reinforcing pupils' segmenting and blending skills. As a result, some weaker readers do not receive the support to help them read fluently.
- Pupils study a wide range of subjects. Work in pupils' books in subjects other than English and mathematics shows that teachers do not always plan activities that challenge pupils' deeper thinking and stretch the most able pupils.
- Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills. They provide good advice that pupils use to edit and redraft their work. However, pupils' work is not always presented well because there is not a systematic approach to developing pupils' handwriting skills.
- Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning when they are clear about the skills being taught. At times, their effectiveness is diminished when they have no clear purpose in the lesson. Learning is less effective when teaching assistants work in isolation from the class teacher. In these cases, they do not match work so well to pupils' needs.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Leaders place a high priority on developing pupils' sense of belonging and self-confidence. The nurturing environment creates a strong school community where individuals are respected and valued alike. One parent who commented on Parent View wrote, 'We are one big family at Benington and the feel of community is reflected throughout the school.' This view was reflected in the comments made by other parents.
- Leaders and staff are sensitive to pupils' needs. They use the expertise of staff to support pupils' welfare. Where issues are identified, additional sessions are provided for pupils to help them deal with issues of relationships or understand their feelings when suffering bereavement.
- Pupils are proud of their achievements. They have opportunities to share their work when they are awarded a 'BOB' (Best of Benington). Pupils independently select work that reflects key steps in their learning and confidently discuss this in front of parents and the school community. This contributes well to developing their self-esteem. However, not all pupils' written work is presented in the neatest way.
- Pupils who talked to the inspector say that they feel safe. Teachers provide good guidance when pupils are online. Pupils are clear that they would not provide their own names and details when using the internet. Pupils are aware of different types of bullying, although they say this is rare in their school. They are confident that adults will support them if they have any worries or concerns.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are well mannered, polite and courteous. They talk enthusiastically about their work and the opportunities provided at the school. Pupils' good behaviour is recognised through the 'Benington bees' system. This identifies how pupils exemplify the values of the school through their actions and friendships. Over time, a hive is developed, reinforcing the sense of community across the school.
- Incidents of poor behaviour are rare. Pupils listen well to adults and respond quickly to their directions. This maximises the opportunities for learning during the day. Pupils share their games and activities during playtimes and lunchtimes. Playground buddies check for any pupil who is feeling lonely or is looking for someone to play with. Pupils have devised posters with playground activities, such as 'shoelaces' or 'handshakes'. This ensures that there is always something to do and maintains a calm and orderly environment.
- Pupils' attendance is above the national average. Leaders promote good attendance proactively through clear expectations and systems. They analyse attendance regularly for any patterns and trends. This ensures that attendance is good.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- This is a small school, so making comparisons of groups with national standards must be done with caution. However, it is possible to evaluate outcomes over time and the progress pupils make from their starting points.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 has been consistently above national averages at expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Attainment at higher standards has been more variable, especially in mathematics. Evidence seen in pupils' workbooks and school assessment information show that more pupils are working at higher standards. However, the challenge in mathematics for the most able pupils is not consistent in all classes.
- In key stage 1, attainment has risen and is often above national averages for expected standards at the end of Year 2. In the provisional information for 2018, there is an increasing proportion of pupils working at greater depth, especially in reading and mathematics.
- The proportion of pupils reaching the required level in the Year 1 phonics screening check for 2018 is well above the national average. Pupils use their phonics knowledge well to become fluent readers as they enter key stage 2.
- Pupils enjoy reading and are encouraged to read widely. Older pupils review their reading progress and do so enthusiastically. Adults make frequent checks of their reading so that books are age-appropriate. Consequently, pupils are making strong gains with their reading.
- Pupils' writing develops a fluency and maturity as they move through the school. They write regularly and at length, improving their writing stamina and resilience. The writing seen in pupils' books shows greater confidence in the use of punctuation and the spelling of complex words. However, weak handwriting skills are limiting the progress some pupils make.
- Pupils develop a range of skills across the curriculum. Some work is not sufficiently challenging for the most able pupils across different subjects.
- Pupils are well prepared for their next stage of education, both at key stage 2 and their transition into middle or secondary school.

Early years provision

Good

- Children enter the early years at a stage of development that is broadly typical for their age, with some above. From their starting points, children make good progress. The proportion reaching a good level of development has continued to improve over time and was well above the national average in 2018.
- Leadership of the early years is effective. Staff know their children well and have established clear routines and systems. The strong relationships children enjoy with adults ensure that they settle quickly. Children's social and emotional development is good and helps them to work and play together well. For example, children agreed together the different layers of the cake they would make from moulding materials to take to a birthday party.

- Teaching is planned well and appeals to children’s interests. Learning activities, both directed and free-flowing, are well organised and resourced. The learning environment is bright and attractive. It encourages children to participate and supports their development across a range of different areas.
- Improvements have been made to the outdoor learning area. This provides opportunities for children to develop their creative, physical and social skills. However, adults do not readily build on children’s play to promote opportunities for linking activities to early writing and mathematics skills.
- Links with parents are effective. Clear assessments of children’s development are kept and regularly shared with parents. Parents use this information to support their child’s learning at home.
- Safeguarding in the early years is effective. Staff are appropriately qualified to meet the statutory requirements for ensuring children’s welfare.

School details

Unique reference number	117389
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10067130

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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	97
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Justine Youngman
Headteacher	Barbara Swann
Telephone number	01438 869 254
Website	www.benington.herts.sch.uk
Email address	head@benington.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	19–20 June 2014

Information about this school

- Benington is smaller than the average-sized primary school. There are four classes: one class for Reception children and three mixed-age classes for pupils in Years 1 and 2, Years 3 and 4, and Years 5 and 6.
- The headteacher was appointed in 2017.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium funding is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below the national average.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the early years leader and subject leaders. A meeting was also held with the newly qualified teacher. The inspector had discussions with four governors, as well as holding a telephone conversation with the chair of governors and the school's chosen school improvement partner.
- The inspector scrutinised pupils' books in English, mathematics and foundation subjects in key stages 1 and 2 and learning journals in Reception. A formal discussion was held with a group of pupils. The inspector also spoke to pupils informally in the classroom.
- A range of documentation was reviewed, including the school self-evaluation document, the school development plan, the school's own assessment information, safeguarding procedures, behaviour and racial incident records and attendance records.
- The inspector observed teaching in all classes, sometimes with the headteacher.
- The inspector took into account 70 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and 41 texts from parents. There were nine responses to the staff questionnaire and 22 responses to the pupils' survey.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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