

Inspection of Watford St John's Church of England Primary School

32 Clarendon Road, Watford, Hertfordshire WD17 1JJ

Inspection dates:	25 and 26 February 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Early years provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Anna Pyatt. This school is part of the Poppy Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Alice Aharon, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Nicola Mullett.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy school. They play happily together at breaktimes. They build friendships in a safe environment. They feel safe because they trust the staff to listen and to help them when they have worries.

Staff set high expectations and pupils strive to meet them. They show this in their well-presented written work and their enthusiasm for learning. Pupils study a broad range of subjects and follow a clear approach to learning to read. However, some pupils have not yet built strong enough subject knowledge or learned to read with confidence and fluency.

Pupils behave well and respect the school rules. Staff build strong relationships with pupils and understand their individual needs. They provide effective support to help those who need guidance in managing their feelings and behaviour.

There are a range of opportunities for pupils to explore their interests. Being part of the school council gives pupils a sense of pride and purpose, making them feel valued and empowered. Pupils benefit from educational visits that closely link to the curriculum. These further enhance their learning and broaden pupils' experiences.

The school promotes a culture of kindness, inclusivity, and mutual respect. Pupils are encouraged to support one another and embrace differences.

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

Since the previous inspection, leadership changes and challenges with staffing have slowed school improvements. However, the school has responded by designing a suitable curriculum and rightly prioritising reading, writing, and mathematics. This work is starting to show improvements in pupils' achievement. Although most pupils acquire the essential skills needed for their next stage of education by Year 6, inconsistencies remain. Consequently, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

In some subjects, there is a variability in how the curriculum is delivered. Sometimes, teachers do not consistently check what pupils know. Therefore, learning activities do not always build on pupils' prior knowledge and maximise their learning time. Some pupils finish tasks early, without further extension, while others lack the support needed to fully understand the content. This inconsistency leads to gaps in pupils' knowledge and hinders their ability to retain and recall information.

The school promotes a love of reading through using a wide range of diverse high-quality texts, which are integrated into the curriculum. These texts help pupils to develop positive attitudes to reading. The school has implemented a new approach to the teaching of early reading. This is beginning to help more pupils read fluently. However, some pupils are not learning to read as well as they should. This is because staff do not consistently check what pupils know in lessons and adapt learning promptly enough. Small group targeted support is helping some pupils to catch up quickly. However, other pupils, including those

children in the early years, do not learn the letter sounds as well as they should. This can prevent them from reading fluently and with confidence.

Children in the early years engage independently in creative activities. For example, they play happily in the mud kitchen and explore various materials. They work together effectively and show perseverance. However, sometimes, staff design activities that do not always develop children's curiosity or build on what children already know. Staff do not always engage with children effectively. This limits opportunities for children to extend their thinking and vocabulary and deepen their learning.

The school provides appropriate support and resources for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), helping them to access the curriculum. Pupils receive tailored help. This includes extra staff support and effective resources. As a result, pupils with SEND progress well from their various starting points.

Lunchtimes are positive experiences. Pupils get on well with each other and with the staff. Most pupils listen and participate well in class. The school promotes positive attendance. It works closely with the families of pupils who find attending school difficult. This has led to improved attendance, particularly for some pupils who previously struggled to attend regularly.

The school fosters responsible citizenship by teaching pupils about online safety, including etiquette, respect, and copyright laws. Pupils learn to keep themselves safe by engaging in discussions that explore a variety of real-life scenarios. They take on roles such as play leaders and are proud to contribute positively to their community. A wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs further support their social and personal development.

School leaders have clear intentions to improve the quality of education. Early signs of impact are evident. However, more time is needed for the full impact of this work to be seen. Staff appreciate that leaders consider their workload and well-being. Governors and the trust are committed to ensuring leaders have the capacity for sustained progress.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not consistently check what pupils know and can do. This slows learning and contributes to gaps in pupils' knowledge. This impacts on pupils' ability to recall essential information over time. The school should ensure that teachers check pupils' understanding routinely so that learning is matched to pupils' ability, and they can remember their learning as they progress through the school.

- The school has not ensured that the new phonics programme is implemented consistently well. Staff do not routinely check pupils' understanding. As a result, some pupils struggle with reading and are not as fluent as they could be. The school needs to ensure that the phonics programme is implemented consistently well for all pupils.
- In the early years, the planned activities are not as effective as they could be. Some opportunities to develop and deepen children's language skills are missed. As a result, children do not develop the knowledge and vocabulary they need to be ready for their next steps. The school should ensure that the early years curriculum is implemented effectively so that pupils are well prepared for Year 1.

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	142221
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10345411
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	420
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Nicola Mullett
CEO of the trust	Alice Aharon
Headteacher	Anna Pyatt
Website	www.watfordstjohns.org
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 June 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school joined the Poppy Academy Trust in September 2024.
- The school is a Church of England school and is part of the Diocese of St Albans. The school was last inspected under section 48 of the Education Act 2005, for schools with a religious character, on 2nd May 2019. The next section 8 inspection will be within eight years of this date.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school manages its own before- and after-school childcare provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form

provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection that 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 met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met with members of the trust, the CEO and members of the governing body.
- The lead inspector held telephone conversations with a representative from the diocese and the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English, mathematics, geography and science. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The inspectors considered the views of parents through the responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also spoke with several parents at the start of the school day on the second day of the inspection.
- The inspectors considered the views of staff and pupils through meetings and informal discussions. Inspectors also considered the views of staff through their responses to Ofsted's online survey.

Inspection team

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