

Inspection of a good school: Heathwood Lower School

Heath Road, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 3AU

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 May 2023

Outcome

Heathwood Lower School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Heathwood Lower School is a calm and purposeful place to learn. Pupils are happy here. They are polite, friendly and confident talking to adults. Pupils respond very well to leaders' high expectations of behaviour.

Pupils learn an interesting and stimulating curriculum. They are focused and engaged in lessons. They learn to read fluently and accurately. Pupils who need it get additional support to help them learn successfully.

Kindness is important and is routinely demonstrated by pupils and staff. Pupils' relationships with each other are very positive. They understand the difference between bullying and falling out with their friends. Pupils say that bullying rarely happens and are confident that staff deal with it effectively. Leaders and staff provide high-quality pastoral support. Pupils feel safe in school.

Pupils celebrate their achievements in assemblies and appreciate the recognition they receive. Pupils enjoy taking on roles that contribute towards improving the school for everyone. For example, pupils can become sports leaders or stand for one of the various school councils.

Parents are very positive about the school. One parent, typical of many, commented 'there is a lovely family feel at Heathwood where everyone is welcomed and included'.

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

Leaders have created an ambitious curriculum which is broad and balanced. They select and adapt resources carefully to suit pupils' needs. Leaders ensure that the key knowledge that pupils need to learn is set out clearly in all subjects from early years to Year 4. The new curriculum for foundation subjects has raised expectations of what pupils should know and understand. However, leaders recognise that continued adaptation is needed until this new curriculum is fully developed.

Teachers use their subject expertise to explain new ideas clearly. They make sure that pupils learn new concepts in small steps. They check pupils' understanding carefully. Teaching is particularly effective in mathematics, where teachers quickly identify and correct misconceptions so that pupils do not fall behind. Leaders are still developing the effectiveness of assessment in some foundation subjects.

Leaders promote a strong culture of reading. They have put in place an effective phonics and reading programme. Children in early years quickly learn to blend sounds into words independently. Teachers assess pupils' phonics knowledge regularly. They quickly identify pupils who fall behind and ensure they get the help they need to catch up. All pupils read books matched to their reading ability.

Teachers choose books from a range of authors. These often help deepen pupils' understanding of other parts of the curriculum. Guided reading activities help pupils to develop secure comprehension skills. Pupils read often and enjoy talking about the books they know.

Leaders work hard to ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) get the help they need. Support for pupils with SEND is a strength of the school. Teachers carefully adapt their teaching to successfully meet these pupils' accurately identified needs. Skilled adults provide effective individual and group support. Pupils with SEND access the same curriculum as their peers. They are fully integrated into the life of the school.

Leaders have built a strong culture of positive behaviour. Most pupils show mature levels of self-control and co-operation. They behave well in lessons and around the school. Any low-level behaviour issues are dealt with effectively by staff. Pupils are kind and understanding towards those that sometimes find it more difficult to control their emotions.

Pupils have a rich and varied range of broader experiences. They go on local area visits linked to topics, and residential and other school trips further afield. Extracurricular clubs run after school and are open to all pupils. Staff provide interesting and challenging activities in the weekly mixed-age enrichment sessions.

Leaders place a strong emphasis on values such as trust, cooperation and responsibility through the curriculum and the structures of the school. Elected school councils raise awareness of different issues and enable pupils to have a voice which is taken seriously by leaders. For example, the 'fair-trade council' raises money which is used to support children and families in Africa.

The school is led and managed well. However, recent changes in subject leadership mean that some curriculum leaders are not yet fully familiar with their new areas of responsibility. Leaders engage effectively with staff about their workload and well-being. Staff are very positive about the training and support they receive.

Governors are very committed to their role. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and priorities. They use this information to challenge and support leaders effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have built a strong culture of vigilance and care. Staff are well trained to spot and record any safeguarding concerns. Detailed records show that leaders take timely and effective action to address concerns. They provide appropriate support in school, for example ensuring that pupils have opportunities to talk to adults and share any worries they might have. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online.

Appropriate checks are in place to ensure that adults are suitable to work in the school. Records of these checks are accurate and regularly monitored. Governors carry out their statutory safeguarding duties diligently.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The new curriculum for the foundation subjects has been in place for a relatively short time and has been implemented across all year groups. This means that the older pupils have not benefited from the experience which younger pupils are now getting due to the different sequencing of the previous curriculum. Leaders must continue to develop the use of assessment in these subjects so that gaps in experience and knowledge are identified and topics adapted to take this into account.
- Recent changes in subject leadership mean that some curriculum leaders are not yet fully familiar with their new areas of responsibility. Leaders should ensure that subject leaders are supported to develop their own subject expertise, so that they can accurately monitor and evaluate the implementation of the curriculum.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in September 2013.

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	109513
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10268671
Type of school	Lower
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	2 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	182
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Paula Bangs
Headteacher	Jackie Wright
Website	http://www.heathwoodlower.com/
Date of previous inspection	13 December 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Heathwood Lower School is a smaller-than-average school, catering for pupils aged two to nine. Pupils complete key stage 2 in middle schools.
- The school provides a breakfast club and an after-school club.
- Leaders do not currently use any 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 this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other leaders, the vice-chair of the governing body and the school improvement adviser from the local authority.
- The lead inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the lead inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers

and pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector listened to some pupils read to a familiar adult.

- To inspect safeguarding, the lead inspector scrutinised the school's safeguarding policy, the single central record of background checks on adults at the school, and a sample of child protection records. The lead inspector also spoke with governors, leaders, staff and pupils about safeguarding practices at the school.
- The lead inspector reviewed a range of other documentation, including school policies, leaders' evaluations and development plans and records concerning pupils with SEND.
- The lead inspector observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons, spoke with groups of pupils to understand what it is like to be a pupil in this school and considered responses to the confidential Ofsted pupil survey.
- The lead inspector met with members of staff to discuss the school's work and considered responses to the confidential Ofsted staff survey.
- The lead inspector considered the views of parents, including 75 responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and 30 free-text comments submitted during the inspection.

Inspection team

John Constable, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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