

Inspection of Bernards Heath Junior School

Watson Avenue, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 5HP

Inspection dates: 5 and 6 December 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 14 years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between graded inspections under section 5 of the Act. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at this purposeful, happy and nurturing school. They know that the staff care deeply about their welfare.

Pupils enjoy interesting lessons taught by skilled teachers. Pupils read enthusiastically. Pupils who need it get the additional support they need to help them learn successfully. By the end of their time here, pupils progress and achieve well.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are exemplary. Staff help pupils to adapt quickly to the new routines as they move from infant school. Pupils across the school take their learning seriously. They work incredibly hard in lessons.

Pupils value each other as friends and learning partners. They treat others with high levels of respect and kindness. Bullying rarely happens. Pupils are confident that if it does, staff will deal with it effectively.

There are extensive opportunities for pupils to develop their interests and talents. They take part enthusiastically in clubs, sports teams and other activities, from choir to coding. Pupils have a voice as members of the pupil parliament and the school council, or as sports ambassadors and eco-leaders. Older pupils take their responsibilities as role models very seriously. For example, they enjoy being buddies to younger pupils.

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

The school's established curriculum helps pupils develop subject-specific knowledge and understanding. This prepares them well for secondary school. In most subjects, the important knowledge that leaders want pupils to know is clearly set out and built up over time. Lessons in these subjects are planned carefully. Pupils revisit and remember important knowledge and subject-specific vocabulary.

Teachers teach the curriculum well in most subjects. They use their strong subject expertise to introduce new concepts clearly. Teachers check pupils' understanding using well-considered questions. They quickly spot gaps in pupils' knowledge and adapt their teaching. As a result, pupils develop detailed knowledge. They take pride in the high-quality work they produce. In a few subjects, pupils do not develop their learning over time to the same depth. This is because leaders are still refining curriculum planning and assessment systems.

Leaders are determined that pupils will become fluent readers. Reading is at the heart of the curriculum. Pupils encounter a varied range of high-quality texts. Teachers quickly identify pupils who need help with reading and provide effective extra support. They carefully plan reading activities to help pupils develop their vocabulary and comprehension skills. As a result, pupils become confident and enthusiastic readers.

The school ensures that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) get the help they need. Most pupils with SEND access the same curriculum as everyone else. Teachers are skilled at adapting activities for pupils with SEND. Staff provide tailored individual and group support for those pupils who need it. Consequently, pupils with SEND achieve well.

Strong, positive relationships between staff and pupils are at heart of the school. Staff really do 'know every child'. Pupils attend well. They show high levels of maturity, self-control and cooperation. Adults provide effective support for pupils' social and emotional needs. Pupils are taught the school's core values of respect, resilience and responsibility. They have a real understanding of their meaning. The school is a calm and purposeful place in which to learn.

The provision for personal development is of a very high quality. The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum is very well structured. It is closely linked to pupils' needs. Pupils learn about other cultures and about different relationships. Pupils relish the impressive range of visits, activities and clubs on offer. These help them to develop their talents and understanding of the world. They enthusiastically take part in concerts and sporting and artistic activities.

The governing body is committed to ensuring that pupils receive the best possible education. It has an accurate view of the school's many strengths and what it needs to do to improve further.

Staff appreciate the support of school leaders and are proud to work in the school. They feel listened to and increasingly valued for what they can contribute to the school's development.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive. They value the school's nurturing and supportive atmosphere and appreciate the headteacher's engagement with them. One parent, typical of many, said, 'It's just a great school with a lovely ethos, and my child is thriving.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few areas, curriculum plans do not set out the progression of knowledge and skills in enough detail. As a result, the depth of pupils' understanding is not to the same high standard as it is in the rest of the curriculum. The school should continue to support subject leaders to refine the way the curriculum is planned and delivered in all areas.

- Assessment in a few foundation subjects is not as well developed and robust as in others. This means that teachers do not identify gaps in pupils' knowledge as effectively as they could. The school should ensure that there is a consistently strong approach to assessment, drawing on the very effective practice already in place, so that pupils build secure knowledge in all areas of the curriculum.

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	117143
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10267849
Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	357
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jeremy Hazlehurst and Helen Bellwood (Co-chairs)
Headteacher	Darren Armoogum
Website	www.bernardsheathjnr.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	3 and 4 December 2009, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, a new chair of the governing body and a new headteacher have been appointed. The current headteacher took up post in September 2022.
- The school does not use any providers of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school had 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.

- The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other leaders. The lead inspector met with four members of the governing body and held a telephone conversation with the local authority's school improvement adviser.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, science, history and music. 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 lead inspector listened to some pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- The lead inspector discussed the curriculum with leaders and reviewed documentation for a range of other subjects. He also reviewed school policies, leaders' evaluations and the school's development plans.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the lead inspector: 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.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils to understand what it is like to be a pupil in this school and reviewed 152 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- Inspectors met with members of staff to discuss the school's work and considered 31 responses to Ofsted's confidential survey for staff.
- The lead inspector reviewed 143 responses and 92 free-text comments submitted to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

John Constable, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Georgina Nutton	Ofsted Inspector
Lynda Walker	Ofsted Inspector

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