

Inspection of Unstone St Mary's Nursery & Infant School

Crow Lane, Unstone, Dronfield, Derbyshire S18 4AL

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 May 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy as they arrive at Unstone St Mary's Nursery and Infant School. Children in the early years give their parents a cheery wave as they head down 'Ladybird Lane' into their classroom. Well-established routines help pupils to feel safe and secure. Pupils know that their teachers care for them and look out for them.

The school has identified three core principles that underpin the work that they do. These are: pupils' right to be heard, right to be safe and right to learn. Pupils are expected to work hard and give of their best in lessons. These high expectations of pupils are realised. Pupils listen when asked. If their teacher says: 'Macaroni cheese', pupils respond: 'Everybody freeze'. Then, all eyes are on the teacher. They are expected to be a good friend to others at all times. Playtimes and lunchtimes are full of fun. Pupils who find it more difficult to manage their behaviour receive well considered support. They have time and space to regulate before re-joining their lessons.

Parents and carers are of one voice in their praise for the school. One parent commented, 'The teachers and staff are fantastic. I have no doubt that my child is happy and cared for.'

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

The school has worked with determination to develop a broad and ambitious curriculum. Curriculum plans set out the key knowledge that pupils will learn from Nursery to Year 2. Small steps of learning come together to help pupils to understand complex ideas. In history, key stage 1 pupils learn who King James I was and about the tension that existed between Catholics and Protestants in the past. This knowledge helps them to understand the reasons why Guy Fawkes planned the 'Gunpowder Plot'. Curriculum plans also identify the subject specific vocabulary. In science, pupils are taught the meaning of 'germination', 'seed dispersal' and 'nutrition' to discuss and describe how plants grow.

Staff explain new learning well and provide activities that help pupils to secure the knowledge they need to remember. Staff use assessment well in mathematics and phonics. In these subjects, they routinely check that pupils understand the intended learning. They identify where pupils have misconceptions and address them well in lessons through the use of questioning and additional support. These checks are in their infancy in foundation subjects.

The school has made significant improvements in the teaching of early reading since the last inspection. More pupils now have the phonic knowledge they need to decode words. Staff have received training. However, the school has not kept a close enough eye on how well early reading is taught. There are a small number of occasions when phonics lessons are not delivered with sufficient precision and pure sounds are not consistently used by staff and pupils.

Pupils are enthusiastic about reading. They value books. The school librarians take care of the library with pride. Pupils look forward to story time at the end of each day. Children in the early years enjoy listening to their teacher reading 'The Twits'. They laugh uproariously as they tell the inspector how Mrs Twit mixes worms in Mr Twit's spaghetti!

The school is highly inclusive. Every effort is made to ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are involved in all aspects of school life. Staff work tirelessly to support pupils with SEND to access the curriculum. The school seeks external advice to make sure they are making the right decisions for individual pupils. Each pupil with SEND has a plan that outlines their personal targets and the strategies that are used to help pupils to meet these targets. Some of these plans are too broad and lack precision.

The school promotes pupils' personal development well. Pupils learn right from wrong. They accept that people can be different. The school's assembly programme provides them with the opportunity to consider and debate big ideas. For example, 'What makes a person inspirational?' and 'What's the best way to handle disappointment?' These assemblies also help pupils to make links with British Values. The school's ambition that pupils will be well prepared for the next stage of their education, and life beyond school, gets off to a great start.

Governors understand their role and fulfil their statutory responsibilities. Staff describe themselves as: 'a family'. They appreciate the training and support they have received as they have worked together to improve the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not kept a close enough eye on the teaching of phonics. It has not identified that there are occasions when the delivery of phonics lacks sufficient precision. This may slow pupils' ability to acquire new sounds and learn to read. The school should ensure that the phonics programme is effectively monitored so that staff can be targeted with the right training and support.
- The school does not identify the targets for pupils with SEND, or the strategies that will be used to support them, with enough precision. There is a lack of clarity about the progress these pupils have made and which of the strategies used have worked well. The school should ensure that the plans they produce for pupils with SEND provide sufficient detail so that all staff know the goals that have been set and how they should be supported to reach them.
- Assessment is not fully developed in some of the foundation subjects. Gaps in pupils' learning are not always quickly identified or addressed. Leaders should

refine their approach to assessment in these subjects is established so that teachers can accurately identify what pupils know and remember of the intended learning.

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	112643
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10298380
Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	43
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Laura Birch
Headteacher	Rachael Fowlds
Website	www.unstone.derbyshire.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 February 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Unstone Schools Federation with Unstone Junior School. They share the same headteacher and governing body.
- The school runs a breakfast club and an after-school club. Both are managed and operated by the school.
- The school does not use 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 received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior teacher and coordinator for special educational needs. The lead inspector met with three members of the governing body, including the chair of governors and held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also reviewed the curriculum for science, history and religious education.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils from Year 1 and Year 2 reading to a member of staff.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at various times of the day, including in lessons, breaktime, lunchtime and in assembly.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons and at other times during the school day. There were no responses to the pupil survey.
- Inspectors spoke with parents at the start of the school day. They considered responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, and free-text comments.
- Inspectors met with members of staff and considered responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Caroline Poole, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

George Huthart

Ofsted Inspector

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