



15th December 2022

Dear Parents and Carers,

Ofsted Report

Following our recent Ofsted inspection, we are delighted to attach a copy of our Ofsted 'letter'.

As I explained in my previous communication, as an already 'Good' school, we received an 'ungraded Section 8 inspection'. This type of inspection is designed to determine whether the school continues to provide a good standard of education and if safeguarding is effective. THIS TYPE OF INSPECTION DOES NOT RESULT IN A CHANGE OF GRADE (for example to Requires Improvement or to Outstanding).

The key outcomes of the inspection in November were that; 'Russell Lower School continues to be a good school' and that 'arrangements for safeguarding are effective.'

Since September 2019, Ofsted have introduced a new 'Education Inspection Framework' Under this new Ofsted framework it is now incredibly challenging to even retain a 'good' rating. The proverbial 'bar' has been raised very significantly since the school was last inspected in 2016, particularly in terms of the curriculum, so to maintain this outcome is greatly positive.

As you know, throughout the inspection, parents, children, governors and staff were all phenomenal! Inspectors were so impressed by the warm, friendly welcome and the incredible behaviour and attitude of the children throughout.

The letter is extremely complimentary and the HMI (His Majesty's Inspector) was staggered by the incredible feedback from parents, children and staff. The Inspector had never seen anything like it before and was incredulous at the 'Parent View' responses. We are delighted that everyone's hard work has been recognised and the children's achievements and successes celebrated through our continued recognition of being 'a good school'. The letter and verbal feedback we received as part of the inspection was full of praise for everyone and the school environment.

Some key findings and quotes were:

*"Leaders and staff have **high expectations**."*

*"Pupils make **good progress**."*

*"Pupils behave well because they have **clear routines and boundaries**... This enables them to learn."*

Russell Lower School

Challenge • Enjoy • Respect • Succeed



"Pupils understand that school is a place to **work hard** and they **show positive attitudes** towards learning." "Leaders **promote pupils' wider development well.**"

"Leaders and staff **prioritise reading.** Pupils **enjoy reading** and talk enthusiastically about books...**staff have the expertise to teach reading and phonics consistently and well.**"

"Pupils are **friendly and happy.**" "School is a **nurturing and caring environment for all pupils.**"

"Pupils benefit from a **broad curriculum** that develops their interests...leaders have developed a **curriculum** that **ensures** that **pupils learn the knowledge and skills they need** in order to be **ready for the next stage of their education.**"

"Pupils **are keen to share their knowledge** and their ideas. They enjoy talking about their learning and **they show pride in their work.**"

"Pupils **say bullying is rare,** but that when it happens, there are **clear consequences.**"

"Pupils **are accepting of each other's differences** and interests."

"Leaders ensure that **pupils with SEND access the full curriculum...**most **pupils with SEND make strong progress.**"

"Adults regularly **check pupils' learning** in lesson...and **address** any **misconceptions** pupils may have."

"Pupils are confident that **all staff will help them** if they need it." "Leaders **act promptly** ensure that **pupils get the help they need.**"

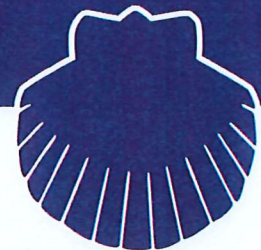
"Pupils **learn how to keep themselves safe.**"

"Governors assure themselves that leaders' work to improve the school is making a **positive difference for all pupils.**"

"Parents and carers are **all very positive** about the school."

Staff and Governors are delighted that our hard work and commitment to high quality learning, teaching and excellent pastoral care and support has been recognised and feel that the Inspector made sound judgements and valued points that captured our school's ethos.

The HMI also said in verbal feedback: '**this school has lots of strengths,**' and also recognised school's leadership is '**extremely strong**' and is well positioned to continue to move the school forward. She also added: 'The **LSAs are incredible** and they are really valued. It is clear the staff



here **value and support each other** and that workload and **wellbeing is a priority** and considered carefully.' She said that the staff were '**incredibly calm**' and that as a result, the children were too, and gave attention so they could learn. She said '**early reading is prioritised**', '**subject knowledge is consistent and good**', '**SEND support** in the classroom is **effective**,' '**behaviour is excellent**,' and 'the classrooms are of **extremely high quality** and filled with very useful information. She continued, 'the children are utterly **passionate about their learning**, their teachers, their school and their **Russell Rights**. They were so **confident** and wanted to tell me everything – they wouldn't let me get away!'

The HMI identified only two 'Next Steps' to continue to develop our school further so that we can progress towards outstanding:

- Reading books need to be *even more precisely* matched to the children's phonics knowledge – this is something that we continue to do on an on-going basis and will certainly continue to focus on
- Teachers need to *continue* to develop their subject knowledge in *all subject areas* to help children remember important subject knowledge – again, at Russell we are always continuing to develop this: for example, in 2023 we will focus on developing subject knowledge in the computing curriculum and school-wide writing expertise

Thank you for your incredible support during the inspection, and a huge thank you for all your support every week of the year. As I have said on many occasions before, Russell is one amazing community! Thank you all.

Yours sincerely,

Nicki Walker
Headteacher

Richard Gallagher
Chair of Governors

Inspection of a good school: Russell Lower School

Queens Road, Ampthill, Bedfordshire MK45 2TD

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 November 2022

Outcome

Russell Lower School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are friendly and happy. They behave well, and this enables all the pupils to learn. Relationships between staff and pupils are respectful and positive. Pupils are accepting of each other's differences and interests. Leaders and staff have high expectations. Pupils behave well because they have clear routines and boundaries.

Pupils benefit from a broad curriculum that develops their interests. They are keen to share their knowledge and their ideas. Pupils enjoy talking about their learning and they show pride in their work. They understand that school is a place to work hard and they show positive attitudes to learning. Most pupils achieve well and are well prepared for when they move to middle school.

Pupils understand what bullying is. They say that bullying is rare, but that when it happens, there are clear consequences. Pupils are confident that all staff will help them if they need it.

Parents and carers are all very positive about the school. Pupils make good progress, and the school is a nurturing and caring environment for all pupils. Pupils develop their interests through a variety of trips and clubs. Pupils learn about local and worldwide concerns, such as pollution.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum that ensures that pupils learn the knowledge and skills they need in order to be ready for the next stage in their learning. Leaders have identified the important knowledge they want pupils to learn from Reception to Year 4. They have ordered this in a way that is logical and helps pupils to build on what they already know and can do.

In most subjects, staff have the knowledge required to teach the planned curriculum well. Adults regularly check pupils' learning in lessons. They address any misconceptions pupils

have. Pupils can use subject-specific language to explain their learning. Regular assessments help the staff to understand which pupils are not keeping up. A few teachers do not have as secure subject knowledge in a small number of curriculum areas. This means that occasionally, teachers plan activities that do not focus precisely on the intended learning.

Leaders and staff prioritise reading. Pupils enjoy reading and talk enthusiastically about books they like. Children start to learn to read from the very start in Reception. Staff have the expertise to teach reading and phonics consistently and well. Adults check regularly on pupils' phonics knowledge. Adults use these checks to provide extra help to pupils to help them keep up. However, some pupils read books that do not precisely match their phonics knowledge, making it harder for them to learn to read. However, most pupils become confident, fluent readers by the time they leave the school.

Leaders ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access the full curriculum. The special educational needs coordinator has close links with local nursery schools to make sure that pupils with SEND are identified as early as possible. Staff are trained to understand how to support different needs and how to adapt the curriculum when necessary. This helps most pupils with SEND to make strong progress in their learning.

Leaders promote pupils' wider development well. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about their interests and broader knowledge. For example, some pupils were concerned about pollution in the local area. They can link this concern to animals losing their habitats and then becoming extinct. Pupils develop their interests and aspirations for their future. Pupils understand that respecting and listening carefully to each other are important. A range of visits and visitors to the school complement the curriculum that pupils learn.

Staff value the support they get from leaders, particularly for well-being. They share the high ambitions that leaders and governors have for the pupils. Governors assure themselves that leaders' work to improve the school is making a positive difference for all pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff receive regular training so that their knowledge of safeguarding is relevant and up to date. Staff know how to spot that pupils need help or are at risk of harm. Leaders act promptly to ensure that pupils get the help they need. Leaders involve other agencies when appropriate to keep pupils safe from harm.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. They know how important it is to stay safe when online.

Governors assure themselves that safeguarding policies and procedures are robust. This includes ensuring that the checks required for adults working in the school are completed thoroughly.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils read books that are not closely matched to their phonics knowledge. This means that these pupils do not practise using their phonics knowledge. This means that they do not become accurate, fluent readers as quickly as they could. Leaders should ensure that adults use their assessments to ensure that all pupils are given books that are matched closely to their current phonics knowledge.
- In a few curriculum areas, some teachers are still developing their subject knowledge. This means that some teaching does not focus on the subject knowledge that curriculum leaders intend pupils to learn. Leaders should ensure that all teachers have the secure subject knowledge needed to plan activities that help pupils remember important subject knowledge.

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 November 2011.

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	109495
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10200314
Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	449
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mr Richard Gallagher
Headteacher	Mrs Nicolette Walker
Website	www.russell-lower.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has three classes in each year group from Reception to Year 4. Pupils complete key stage 2 in middle schools.
- The school has expanded from two forms of entry to three forms of entry. This process began in 2015.
- The headteacher was new to the school at the time of the previous inspection in 2016.
- The chair of the governing body is new to this role and there are five new members of the governing body.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school had 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.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and other school leaders to discuss the quality of education and safeguarding for pupils.

- The inspector met with the chair of the governing body and seven members of the governing body. The previous chair came to this meeting.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in early reading, geography and mathematics. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector reviewed the information that is published on the school website.
- The inspector had a phone conversation with the school's improvement partner.
- To evaluate the arrangements that are in place to safeguard pupils and staff, the inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead, considered school records and spoke with staff and pupils. The inspector scrutinised the single central record of pre-employment checks and school records.
- The inspector observed the pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. The inspector spoke with pupils to seek their views.
- The inspector considered the 178 responses to Ofsted Parent View, together with the free-text comments. Inspectors reviewed the 54 responses to the staff survey. They also considered the 65 responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Jessie Linsley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates:
<http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2022

