

Inspection of a good school: Birch Wood (Melton Area Special School)

Grange Drive, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire LE13 1HA

Inspection dates:

16 and 17 April 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might be outstanding if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending Birch Wood. They appreciate that they are treated as individuals within a highly supportive team. Pupils are helped to achieve their personal best in an environment that is aspirational and caring.

Pupils know this is a kind school. They play an extremely positive role in ensuring that similarities and differences are celebrated, and unkindness is not tolerated. Pupils behave exceptionally well, both in lessons and around the school.

Pupils have consistently positive attitudes towards their education. They enjoy a range of subjects and understand how reading and mathematics will help them in the future. From the day that pupils join the school, staff are preparing pupils for adulthood.

Staff encourage pupils to develop their communication skills, make decisions and become independent. Pupils gain an appropriate understanding of the wider world, and they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Pupils know why coming to school often is important and most are rarely absent. The school works productively with families, pupils and external organisations to help all pupils attend as frequently as they can. Staff know pupils well and are vigilant in supporting their well-being.

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

The curriculum is broad and ambitious and leads to pupils achieving excellent outcomes. Pupils gain a suitable range of qualifications and move on to purposeful and sustained post-16 courses. As a result of the grounding they are given at the school, many former pupils enter into training and employment at an appropriate time for them.

Reading is prioritised so that all pupils can access the full curriculum. Staff have designed a reading curriculum that is sequential and helps pupils develop their confidence and enjoyment of reading. Pupils gain the foundations of reading as soon as they start school. Phonics and the pre-phonics programmes are used extremely well to help pupils develop their reading and communication skills.

Staff have strong subject knowledge and present information clearly. They check pupils' understanding often and give encouragement and clear feedback. Staff use appropriate assessment and carefully selected resources to help all pupils achieve. Pupils are helped to develop a love of learning.

Post-16 students follow a well-designed curriculum at a local sixth-form college. This arrangement promotes inclusion and helps to prepare these students very well for their next steps.

Pupils benefit from high-quality careers education. They have individual careers interviews and enjoy meaningful encounters with the world of work. Staff help pupils make positive choices about their futures.

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is extensive. Pupils have access to a wide set of experiences that are planned coherently to enrich the curriculum. Trips and visits, including residentials and community activities, deliberately help pupils achieve their education, health and care (EHC) plan outcomes.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education and an understanding of British values are embedded within the curriculum. Pupils talk confidently about issues relating to tolerance, respect, individual liberty, the rule of law, democracy, faith and inclusion. They are well prepared to contribute positively to society.

The way that the school develops pupils' character is exemplary. Pupils are rewarded for helping others, being kind, showing resilience, being reflective, having high aspirations, taking responsibility, showing respect and being polite. As a result, these characteristics are evident throughout the school community.

Relationships between staff and pupils reflect the school's positive culture. Pupils are taught to how behave impeccably and consistently meet these high expectations. Pupils support each other in their learning. Their conduct ensures that the aims of the aspirational curriculum are realised.

Staff are proud to work at the school. They benefit from highly effective training opportunities. They appreciate the school's efforts to support their workload and promote their well-being.

The school is exceptionally well led and managed. Senior leaders and governors share the same vision. They have an unwavering commitment to providing a high quality of education for all pupils. This commitment is realised by ensuring that pupils' needs are correctly identified and thoroughly met. Governors hold the school closely to account.

They make sure that resources are well managed and that the school fulfils its statutory duties. Everyone is determined to make sure that the school keeps improving.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 December 2014.

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	134640
Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	10313270
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	228
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Susan Herlihy
Executive Headteacher	Rosalind Hopkins
Website	www.birchwoodschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 June 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There have been changes to the leadership team and governing body since the previous inspection. The former headteacher is now the executive headteacher. The provision has two new heads of school, two deputy headteachers and a non-teaching designated safeguarding leader. The governing body now has two vice-chairs.
- The school has grown. Ashton House Secondary Autism Provision is now part of the school. The number of children in the early years setting has increased.
- Post-16 students learn at the Birch Wood College Post-16 Base. This is situated at a local sixth-form college.
- The school caters for pupils with a wide range of special educational needs, primarily speech, language and communication needs; autism; severe learning difficulty; moderate learning difficulty; social, emotional and mental health; physical disability and profound and multiple learning difficulty.

- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- 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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- 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.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the deputy headteachers, the heads of school, the assistant headteachers and other leaders. They also spoke with staff and three parents.
- The lead inspector had a meeting with three governors, including the chair of the governing body. He had a telephone discussion with an independent school adviser and a virtual meeting with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, art and design, and reading. 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. Inspectors also visited some lessons in other subjects.
- Inspectors observed behaviour in class and around the school. They also scrutinised a range of documents provided by leaders.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments, and Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Simon Mosley, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Kyna Adkins

Ofsted Inspector

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