

Inspection of an outstanding school: Breakspeare School

Gallows Hill Lane, Abbots Langley, Hertfordshire WD5 0BU

Inspection dates:

7 and 21 March 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel happy, safe, and well cared for. They enjoy school. Pupils are friendly and welcoming. They are proud of their school and what they achieve. Pupils benefit from a broad and relevant curriculum. This is adapted well to meet their individual needs and to extend their interests. Pupils gain the confidence to express their choices and to communicate their needs. They are well prepared for their next steps in education and for adulthood. However, some pupils do not develop their knowledge and skills in early reading as well as they could. This limits their progress in reading fluency.

Relationships between pupils and staff are positive and respectful. Pupils know that staff will listen to them if they have any worries or concerns. Pupils learn strategies that help them to manage their emotions and express their needs. They learn how to keep themselves and others safe when at school, in the wider community and when they are using the internet.

Pupils who are members of the school council carry out regular surveys to gain other pupils' views. They ensure that every member of the school community has a voice. The school council team works together to help make the school even better for everyone.

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

Leaders are ambitious for what they want pupils to achieve. Individualised plans set out clearly the learning steps that support each pupil to make good progress. Assessment is used well to identify pupils' starting points and their next steps. Leaders ensure that staff have the training they need to support pupils to be successful.

Staff plan lessons and activities that help pupils to make connections with what they have learned before. There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' communication skills.

This includes listening to others and turn taking, as well as developing pupils' communication through augmentative alternative communication (AAC), signs, symbols, text and speech. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are supported well through a multi-sensory approach.

The curriculum is broad and balanced. The mathematics curriculum sets out the important mathematical knowledge and vocabulary that pupils should learn. Pupils practise their knowledge in real-life situations, such as visits to the local shops and café, and in cooking. They participate regularly in activities such as swimming, and horse-riding, music and the creative arts. Well-planned visits and experiences help pupils to deepen their understanding of the world and to contribute as members of the community. Leaders' curriculum documents do not capture the full breadth of the curriculum that pupils experience. Leaders have not clearly set out how the curriculum supports pupils to develop their knowledge and make connections in their learning between the subjects they study. Leaders' documentation does not communicate clearly their curriculum expectations to staff and to parents.

Leaders prioritise reading across the school. Pupils develop their enjoyment of reading and their interest in books. Staff make sure that books are suitably adapted to ensure that pupils participate fully in reading and deepen their understanding of stories and texts. The reading curriculum helps pupils to develop their skills of recall and prediction. Pupils explore how characters in a story may be feeling or what motivates particular actions. Pupils read regularly at school and share books at home. They talk enthusiastically about the kind of books they like to read. Some pupils are taught phonics. Teachers follow a clear sequence of learning so that pupils build up their phonics knowledge systematically. However, these pupils do not routinely access books and texts that are closely matched to the sounds they are learning. This means that they are not having regular opportunities to practise and apply their phonics knowledge to read. Consequently, these pupils do not develop their fluency and independence in reading as quickly as they could.

There is a consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour. Pupils learn to make positive choices and how to communicate their wishes and feelings to others. Leaders regularly review behaviour and safeguarding incidents.

The provision for pupils' wider development is at the heart of the school's work. The curriculum for relationships and sex education (RSE) provides pupils with important knowledge to help them to form healthy relationships and to keep themselves and others safe. Staff work closely with families to support this work at school and at home.

Governors bring a range of skills and experience to their role. They are well informed through regular focused visits to the school. They hold leaders to account effectively for their work. Leaders' work to promote well-being extends to pupils, families and staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff are well informed about safeguarding through regular and relevant training. Staff know how to recognise the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Staff understand their responsibility to speak up if something is not right. They record concerns accurately and promptly using the school's reporting system. Leaders follow up concerns diligently. They work closely with other agencies to help vulnerable pupils and their families access the support they need. Pupils learn to keep themselves safe at school, at home, online and in the wider community.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read using phonics do not readily have access to texts that are matched to the sounds that they are learning. This limits their reading fluency because they do not have regular opportunities to practise and apply the sounds they are learning. Leaders should ensure that texts are closely matched to pupils' phonics knowledge, so that they become confident, fluent and independent readers more quickly.
- Leaders' curriculum documentation does not clearly set out their expectations of the full range of subjects that pupils study. This makes it more difficult for leaders to ensure that the curriculum is being implemented as intended and for leaders to monitor the full extent of the difference the curriculum makes to pupils' learning and achievement. Leaders should review how they capture and communicate the school's curriculum so that staff and parents are clear about the full range of learning opportunities and how these connect to enable all pupils to be successful.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in September 2017.

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	117681
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10255261
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	97
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	7
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Vanessa Robinson and Jane Rogers co-chairs
Headteacher	Merja Paakkonen
Website	www.breakspeare.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with profound and multiple learning needs. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Breakspeare School is part of The Sunflower Federation with Meadow Wood School. Breakspeare School and Meadow Wood School are registered separately with the Department for Education. Each school is inspected separately by Ofsted.
- The headteacher has responsibility for both schools.
- There is a single federation governing body. The two co-chairs were appointed to their roles in September 2021.
- One of the classes that is part of Breakspeare School is co-located on the Meadow Wood School site.

- There are no pupils attending alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- 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.
- The inspection began on 7 March. However, the lead inspector was unable to complete day two of the inspection. Consequently, the second day was rescheduled for 21 March with a different lead inspector.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team.
- The lead inspector met with the two co-chairs of governors. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with the school's improvement adviser from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading and communication, mathematics, and independence and social skills. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also explored the curriculum with leaders across a wider range of subjects.
- Inspectors met with members of the safeguarding team, including the designated leader and deputy leaders for safeguarding. They discussed the arrangements that are in place to support safeguarding. Inspectors looked at records of safeguarding concerns and how these are followed up. Inspectors reviewed the arrangements for pre-employment and recruitment checks, and scrutinised the single central record.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's records of behaviour, including bullying, and records of suspensions. The lead inspector met with the headteacher to discuss attendance and review the arrangements for pupils who require part-time timetables. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors reviewed the information that is available on the school's website, including school policies and information about the curriculum.
- Inspectors considered the 16 responses to Ofsted Parent View, including 10 free-text comments. Inspectors took account of the 24 responses to the staff survey. Inspectors spoke with pupils to gather their views and experiences of the school and met with members of the school council.

Inspection team

Katherine Douglas, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Wendy Varney, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jessie Linsley	His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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