

Heritage House School

Cameron Road, Chesham, Buckinghamshire HP5 3BP

Inspection dates

15–16 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The interim headteacher has breathed fresh life into the school. She has inspired the whole community with her compelling vision of a school that puts the pupil at its heart.
- Recently appointed leaders have quickly got to grips with their new roles and have put in place well-received initiatives, particularly in relation to assessment.
- Teaching is highly effective because teachers, support staff and therapists work together in a coherent way to meet pupils' individual communication needs.
- Pupils in all year groups, including those who are disadvantaged, make strong progress in their learning, communication skills and physical development.
- The curriculum, including the many enrichment opportunities on offer, is broad, balanced and well matched to pupils' needs. Leaders rightly plan to increase the levels of challenge the curriculum provides for the most able, so that these pupils can make even stronger progress.
- The curriculum successfully promotes independence and readiness for adult life. Consequently, the school prepares pupils exceptionally well for their next steps and for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils in the senior school, including students aged 16 to 19, benefit from a rich and vibrant vocational curriculum that leads to appropriate accreditation.
- Pupils are safe and feel safe. All staff are passionate about promoting pupils' welfare and well-being and know what to do if they are concerned about a pupil. However, not all staff understand their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty.
- Pupils' conduct is excellent. They have extremely positive attitudes to their learning and are rightly proud of their school.
- The interim executive board (IEB) has provided much-needed stability and clarity of purpose, during a turbulent period in the school's history.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Help the most able pupils to make even stronger progress by further increasing the level of challenge in their curriculum.
- Make sure that all staff know and understand their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since her appointment in 2017, the interim headteacher has transformed all areas of the school's work. Driven by the sincerely held aim to 'put the learner at the centre', she has galvanised the whole school community.
- Parents and carers are quick to praise the positive impact of the interim headteacher. One parent who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, wrote: 'The interim headteacher's determination to do the best she can for all the children is infectious and the number of positive initiatives she has got off the ground is astonishing.'
- Staff are also supportive of the direction the school is now taking. Nearly all staff who responded to Ofsted's staff survey say that the school has improved since its previous inspection, and that they are proud to work at the school.
- An early priority for the interim headteacher was to improve the quality of teaching. In this, she has been highly successful. By enabling teachers, support staff and therapists to plan and teach together, pupils' learning and their physical and emotional needs are more fully met. At the same time, she has invested in specialist training for staff. This has increased the repertoire of interventions and approaches that they are able to use. A member of staff wrote, 'We have great new training opportunities which we never had before.'
- The interim headteacher has strengthened her leadership team with a number of key appointments. Recently appointed leaders for different aspects of the school's work have lost no time in devising new assessment arrangements, and training staff in their use. Teachers and other staff now have clear information about each pupil's targets, as well as a straightforward system for recording pupils' small steps towards their targets.
- Pupils are given experience of a wide range of curriculum areas, including literacy, mathematics, science, music and art. Older pupils and students in the sixth form benefit from a recently developed vocational offer. There is also a necessary and appropriate focus on pupils' physical development. For example, pupils gain immense enjoyment, as well as the opportunity to challenge themselves, in their physical education (PE), swimming and hydrotherapy sessions.
- Pupils also benefit from enrichment activities, carefully tailored to their needs, which promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. A range of lunchtime clubs are available, as are offsite visits, in which pupils learn to carry out daily tasks independently.
- Leaders make effective use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils, those who need help with English and mathematics, and funding for PE and sport. Leaders sensibly take account of pupils' barriers to learning and of research findings into the most effective practice to inform their spending plans.
- There is a strong emphasis throughout the school on equality and diversity, through the consistent promotion of pupils' human rights. This emphasis is also evident in the curriculum, which is personalised to each pupil's unique needs.

- Leaders are not complacent about their achievements to date and are ambitious to improve further. They recognise that there is scope to broaden the range of curriculum experiences open to pupils, especially for the most able. In addition, leaders have plans to improve elements of the personal, social, health and economics (PSHE) education curriculum, so that all pupils develop their understanding of relationships and sex education.

Governance of the school

- Since the formation of the IEB, governors have been tireless in their drive to improve the learning environment, improve pupils' outcomes and broaden their opportunities. Energetically led by the experienced chair, the IEB has steered the school through a turbulent period in its history. Governors are rightly proud of what has been achieved in the past two years.
- Governors hold leaders stringently to account in their meetings and school visits. To further improve their insight into the effectiveness of leadership, governors have recently linked themselves to specific aspects of the school development plan. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this promising initiative.
- Governors are diligent in carrying out their statutory functions and have exercised thoughtful stewardship of all areas of the school's work. For example, they have ensured that the school has a balanced budget and have generously donated their own time and skills to supporting the school. They monitor the impact of additional funding carefully and always ask what more can be achieved
- Governors have invested wisely in their own training, particularly in relation to safeguarding.
- Recognising the need to ensure stable leadership and sustainable strategic oversight, governors have credible plans in place to appoint a substantive headteacher, and to establish a governing body to take over from the IEB.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school provides a nurturing, calm environment in which pupils can flourish. In keeping with the school's mission to put pupils at the centre of their work, staff are devoted to the well-being and welfare of their pupils. Pupils are treated with dignity and respect at all times and, in turn, they respond warmly to the staff who look after them.
- Leaders ensure that all those who work or volunteer in the school have undergone the necessary pre-employment checks. Governors carry out their own rigorous audits of safeguarding practice in the school.
- Staff are confident in their ability to know when a pupil might be suffering or at risk of harm, and understand the school's procedures for reporting concerns. Although all staff have had up-to-date safeguarding training, some staff are unclear about their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty.
- Training for staff in supporting pupils with their personal care needs and manual handling is effective. Staff feel confident in undertaking the high levels of personal care

needed.

- Leaders responsible for safeguarding have forged positive relationships with external agencies. Consequently, when it is necessary to refer a safeguarding matter to the local authority's social care team, leaders ensure, and if necessary insist, that vulnerable pupils and families receive timely and effective support.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Heritage House School is full of joy. Songs and stories echo down every corridor and the affirming words of staff praising pupils, as they challenge themselves to be more independent, hang in the air.
- Not a minute is wasted, but neither are pupils hurried. Staff recognise that learning takes time and turn every activity into a significant learning opportunity. For example, staff give pupils the time they need to make their way independently from the classroom to the dining hall. In the vocational centre, pupils were given time to sort drill bits into different sizes. Pupils in the hydrotherapy pool beamed with delight as they moved through the water with their adult helpers, while the ability to push their way through a virtual forest in the sensory room filled another group of pupils with awe and wonder.
- The recently implemented assessment system means that, since the start of this calendar year, staff have been able to capture in greater detail the small steps in learning that pupils make, particularly for those with profound and multiple needs. Teachers give precise and immediate feedback to pupils on their progress.
- Teachers, support staff and therapists make effective use of pupils' education, health and care plans, as well as the assessment information collected in school, to set precise targets. Consequently, each pupil's learning journey is carefully tailored to address their individual needs.
- Pupils who are unable to communicate verbally are given strong and effective support to be able to communicate effectively through the consistent use of symbols and other aids.
- Pupils love the challenge of learning and are keen to improve. Older pupils, with a range of complex needs working in the horticulture centre, discussed the impact of plastic on the environment. They also developed their practical skills when mowing the lawn and their mathematical skills when planting seeds.
- Pupils benefit from well-planned opportunities to understand the world around them. This is evident in their visits to the local town to buy food, which they subsequently cook and eat, and also in trips to different environments such as a nearby nature reserve.
- Recent and rapid improvements in the most able pupils' writing and mathematics demonstrate that teachers' sharper use of assessment is enabling these pupils to make stronger progress than previously. These pupils have the capacity to make even better progress. Leaders recognise this and have plans to increase the range of curriculum opportunities for the most able pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- A driving principle of the school's work is the promotion of independence and readiness for adult life. Staff are highly effective in seizing opportunities to build pupils' confidence and resilience.
- Older pupils learn valuable life skills, such as washing, cooking and socialising with others in the school's flat. When serving in the café, they learn about customer care, and when visiting the local town, they carry out everyday tasks such as shopping for food, crossing the road safely and understanding street signs.
- In lunchtime clubs, such as music, beauty therapy and construction, pupils gain new skills and have the opportunity to make new friends.
- Pupils with profound and complex needs use a range of communication aids, with increasing confidence, to express their wishes and opinions to staff, and to engage in conversation about their learning and feelings.
- The school caters exceptionally well for pupils' emotional and physical development. Staff care deeply about pupils' welfare and are ever-vigilant for changes in their emotional state. Staff also make sure that each pupil has an individual programme of physical exercise.
- Pupils are confident, welcoming to visitors and justifiably proud of their school. They appreciate the help their teachers give them.
- Staff ensure that pupils are alert to risks outside school, for example by talking to them about 'stranger danger'.
- Pupils say that people in school are kind to each other and that they are never mean. Pupils who responded to Ofsted's pupil survey were clear that bullying is not a problem in school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils conduct themselves exceptionally well in lessons and around the school. They have extremely positive attitudes to their learning, showing determination and resilience in completing the tasks that their teachers set for them.
- Where a pupil needs support to regulate his or her behaviour, staff apply the new approach to managing behaviour consistently to reduce the pupil's anxiety levels.
- Leaders are relentless in their work to secure the best possible attendance for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged. All absences are followed up closely, and if a pattern emerges, the school's family advocate works with the family to remove any barriers to regular attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils across the school make strong progress in their learning from their individual starting points because teachers, support staff and therapists work together highly effectively to meet their specific needs.
- New assessment arrangements mean that staff are now better able to identify the small and significant steps in communication skills and physical development made by pupils with profound and complex needs.
- The most able pupils do well in reading, writing and mathematics and have the capacity to make even stronger progress in their learning.
- There are no significant differences in rates of progress for disadvantaged pupils compared to other pupils, or between boys and girls.
- Leaders are assiduous in tracking the progress of disadvantaged pupils and make effective use of additional funding to remove any barriers to their learning. For example, the provision of music therapy sessions has had a positive impact on the well-being of disadvantaged pupils and their readiness to learn.
- Staff give strong support to pupils to help them develop their independence and readiness for adult life, whatever their special educational need and/or disability. As a result, pupils make good progress in mastering everyday activities and are rightly proud of their achievements.
- Recent improvements in the senior school curriculum, such as the introduction of vocational subjects, have enabled pupils to gain appropriate accreditation for their learning.
- Leaders promote literacy and reading effectively. Pupils are becoming increasingly confident in their use of phonics to help them sound out and spell simple words. Stories and songs punctuate the school day, instilling in pupils a love of language and narrative.
- Pupils are well prepared for life and learning after school. When they leave Heritage House School, all pupils progress to an appropriate next step.

Early years provision

Good

- There are very clear processes in place to assess children's needs on entry. Staff liaise closely with parents and therapists to reach the best possible understanding of each child's specific needs, before the child's arrival in the school.
- The whole-school aim of building independence starts as soon as children join the school. For example, in PE, children develop their sense of space, balance and coordination, closely supervised by teachers and support staff.
- Children, including disadvantaged children and the most able, make good progress in relation to their individual targets. Staff make careful assessments of each child's progress across the various elements of the curriculum, so that each child is ready to progress to the next stage of their education after the Reception Year.
- Staff provide pupils with stimulating learning activities that arouse their curiosity about the world around them. This was evident in the sensory room, where children were fascinated by the colours, sounds and movement of an underwater world.

- Early literacy is promoted well. Children love stories, songs and books. Symbols, pictures and words help children to explore the interesting activities laid out in their classroom and outside area.
- Staff help children to manage their own behaviour and to learn and play with others.
- Children are safe and secure in the early years. All staff who work with children have undergone appropriate pre-employment checks and have had relevant safeguarding training.
- The outside area, while readily available to children, is a little cluttered, restricting children's free movement between the toys and activities on offer.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leaders are passionate about preparing students well for their life after school. They have put in place an exciting vocational programme that is underpinned by appropriate accreditation.
- The vocational curriculum allows students to experience areas such as horticulture, construction and beauty therapy. They can also serve drinks and food in the Potting Shed Café, where they learn about food and drink preparation, health and safety and customer care. Students relish the rich opportunities this varied curriculum provides them with and are proud of the qualifications they gain.
- Students have access to high-quality information about their next steps. For example, at a recent careers fair, which was organised by staff, students and parents were able to meet and talk to 23 exhibitors from local colleges, businesses and charities. All students undertake appropriate work experience at local businesses and charities.
- Through weekly trips into the local town and lessons in the school's flat, students learn to use public transport, shop for everyday items, cook simple meals, and wash and dry clothes. Staff teach students how to keep themselves safe in public places, for instance by talking to them about 'stranger danger'.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their learning and play an important role in the life of the school by being role models for younger pupils. Students support younger pupils in PE lessons and serve in the café during breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- The assembly programme prepares students well for life in modern Britain. However, the post-16 curriculum needs to better support students to stay safe when online out of school.
- All students progress to appropriate next steps, with the majority going on to follow life-skills courses at local colleges.

School details

Unique reference number	110582
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10088015

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	70
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	18
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Paul Randall
Interim headteacher	Jacqueline Clearkin
Telephone number	01494 771445
Website	www.heritage-house-school.co.uk
Email address	office@heritagehouse.bucks.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 June 2018

Information about this school

- Heritage House School is a special school, catering for pupils with profound, severe and complex needs.
- In December 2016, the local authority had significant concerns about the leadership and management of the school. As a result, it used its statutory powers to install an interim executive board (IEB). The IEB is now responsible for the governance of the school.
- The IEB appointed an interim headteacher in November 2017 who remains in post.
- In April 2019, the chair of the IEB wrote to parents advising them that the substantive

headteacher had resigned his post.

- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited all classes. All visits were carried out jointly with school leaders.
- Meetings were held with leaders responsible for various aspects of the school's work.
- Inspectors also met with leaders to discuss the impact of additional funding received through the pupil premium, Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium and the PE and sport premium.
- The lead inspector held discussions with the interim headteacher as well as with the chair, vice-chair and a co-opted member of the IEB.
- Inspectors met with a group of pupils and reviewed the nine responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- The views of staff were taken into account by holding meetings with a group of staff and a group of middle leaders, and by analysing the 26 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- Inspectors reviewed the 14 responses and five free-text comments to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.
- Inspectors scrutinised a sample of pupils' work and reviewed a range of documents made available by the school, including leaders' self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.
- A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding procedures at the school by scrutinising documents, examining staff recruitment practices, and meeting the school's designated safeguarding lead.

Inspection team

Gary Holden, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Catherine Davies

Ofsted Inspector

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