

Inspection of an outstanding school: Three Ways School

180 Frome Road, Odd Down, Bath, Avon BA2 5RF

Inspection dates:

22–23 October 2019

Outcome

Three Ways School continues to be an outstanding school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love school. Parents told us that, during the holidays, their children would often ask when they would be going back to school! Pupils and staff get along well. There is no doubt that children's welfare and well-being are at the heart of all that the school does.

Pupils behave extremely well. They show much care towards each other. Pupils and parents agree that the school is safe and there is no bullying. Pupils participate in a huge range of activities. These include visits to the theatre, dance projects and sports competitions. Pupils take pride in all that they achieve.

The new leadership team is ambitious for the pupils. Pupils learn to be independent and how to look after themselves as much as possible. Leaders have started work to improve pupils' early reading skills. Nevertheless, there are some areas to improve. In particular, the planning of work to build on pupils' learning in English and mathematics is not strong enough or evident across the school.

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

A key strength of the school lies in the work it does to help pupils to be prepared for the world around them. A broad range of experiences enables pupils to know better how they can be successful. Teachers use their expertise in special educational needs well to develop pupils' knowledge and skills. Teachers make sure that pupils' education health and care (EHC) plans are fully considered so that pupils can achieve.

Senior leaders know the school has many strengths but that there is still work to do. They have established three different pathways for pupils. The pre-formal pathway is for pupils with the most complex needs. The semi-formal pathway is for those pupils with severe learning difficulties. The formal pathway for those with moderate learning difficulties.

For those pupils on the pre-formal pathway, planning for what pupils will learn is more effective. It provides a range of experiences that build on pupils' understanding. Teachers use a variety of approaches that help pupils to learn well. Teachers ensure that pupils are curious and active. Staff note what excites pupils and use this information to identify the small steps in learning that pupils need to make to help them to succeed.

The pupils in the semi-formal and formal groups study a range of different subjects linked to the national curriculum. Leaders recognised that the planning for what is taught in English and mathematics was not enabling these pupils to achieve as well as they should. Leaders have begun to adapt the planning. This means teachers are setting more precise next steps for pupils to gain the knowledge and skills they need. In some subjects, particularly art, pupils do well and create impressive work.

Leaders have made sure that reading is a high priority. The library has been revamped. Classes have access to a mobile library. Pupils have books matched to their needs. All pupils are assessed in phonics. However, this is at an early stage and, currently, some pupils are not developing their reading skills quickly enough. While some teachers are confident in teaching phonics, this is not the case for all. Leaders are training staff so that there is a whole-school approach to the teaching of reading.

Pupils' communication skills are promoted well through the use of technology, sign and symbols. Teachers help those with the most complex needs to appreciate the world around them through sensory activities, using sound, touch and smell. Pupils enjoy their learning and show a high level of independence. Children in the early years get off to a good start. Staff work well as a team and relationships with children are very supportive and caring.

The school has appointed a team of subject specialists to oversee English and mathematics. The new team has made a good start in improving what they want pupils to learn. These senior leaders provide useful support for teachers to improve teaching.

Leaders are determined that pupils experience life to the full. Creative subjects provide them with a huge range of opportunities, including working with the Oily Cart Theatre Company, and drama activities, for example working with the Egg Theatre. Sporting activities, such as with Bath Rugby Club, add to pupils' experiences. Pupils work at a local farm, which they talk about with enthusiasm. The 3 café provides pupils, including sixth formers, with opportunities for work experience and development of life skills. Sixth-form studies prepare students for life when they leave. Last year all went on to college, and some gained part-time work placements.

Staff made a point of telling us how well they are supported by leaders. They very much appreciate the head teacher's approach and her recognition of all that they do. The wellbeing committee represents all staff and has been proactive in ensuring that staff are well cared for.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that all staff are fully trained in safeguarding. They have a clear understanding of what to do if they have concerns. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the help and support they receive from staff. Strong relationships with a range of outside agencies ensure families get the help they need.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders and teachers know how to plan for the needs of pupils with the most complex needs. However, the next steps for pupils in English and mathematics in the semi-formal and formal groups are not precise enough. As a result, pupils do not consistently build on the knowledge they have gained. Leaders need to ensure pupils gain the necessary knowledge and skills in the right order and precisely enough.
- Leaders are actively promoting reading to ensure that those who can access print develop their skills at a faster rate. The school needs to ensure that there is a whole-school approach to the teaching of reading and that staff are confident in the use of phonics and other strategies that supports pupils' reading skills.
- Leaders are confident in their subject knowledge, but some are still new to management. Senior leaders should ensure that they develop others' leadership skills so that those with leadership roles can effectively develop their subjects.

Background

When we have judged a special school, pupil referral unit or maintained nursery 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 a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Three Ways School, to be outstanding on 6 July 2015.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	140079
Local authority	Bath and North East Somerset Council
Inspection number	10111611
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
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	221
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	30
Appropriate authority	The board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Mike Roberts
Headteacher	Jo Stoling
Website	www.threeways.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Three Ways School became an academy in September 2013. It is the only school in the academy trust.
- Three Ways is a special school which caters for pupils from the ages of 2 to 19 years old. It provides for pupils with complex, severe or moderate learning difficulties. Many pupils also have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have education, health and care plans.
- The headteacher was appointed in 2018.
- The school runs a number of after-school clubs on the school site.
- The school uses one alternative provider, a care farm in Wiltshire.

Information about this inspection

- We held meetings with senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers and support staff.

- We evaluated the quality of education by looking in detail at the teaching of early reading and communication, English, mathematics and personal, social and health education. Creative art subjects were also considered.
- We discussed the curriculum design with leaders, carried out lesson visits, scrutinised pupils' work and spoke to teachers and pupils about the curriculum.
- We evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding. The school's single central record was reviewed and the school's process for recruitment was scrutinised. We met with the designated safeguarding lead, scrutinised documentation and spoke to pupils, staff and parents.
- We observed pupils' arrival and breaktime and visited the 3 café.
- The lead inspector met with five governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- We met with pupils over the two days to discuss their views about school and talked to pupils informally about the school. Six pupils responded to Ofsted's online pupils' survey.
- We talked with a group of parents.
- We took account of the 48 responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey and additional free-text responses.
- We considered the views of 106 members of staff who responded to Ofsted's survey for staff.

Inspection team

Sarah Mascall, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Jen Edwards

Ofsted 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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