

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Barrs Court School

Barrs Court Road, Hereford, Herefordshire HR1 1EQ

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Inspection dates:

22–23 October 2019

## **Outcome**

Barrs Court 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 thrive at this school. They are excited about their learning and eagerly join in with activities. Pupils say that teachers are helpful when they find things difficult. But teachers also encourage them to be as independent as possible. Pupils are well supported by friendly staff who they trust. Staff understand each pupil's unique needs. Classrooms are hives of activity where pupils grow in confidence and succeed in overcoming challenges. Older pupils are well prepared for adulthood.

Pupils make good friends at school. They are kind to one another. There is a real sense of community. Pupils are safe and well looked after. They know that there are staff in school who they can talk to if they are worried about something. Pupils usually behave very well. There are few reported incidents of bullying. When it does happen, staff deal with it straight away.

Pupils are superb ambassadors for their school. They speak with pride about what the school offers them and what they accomplish. Pupils learn that they have control over their destiny. Staff encourage pupils to speak up, and they do. Leaders listen, then shape pupils' school experience based on what they say.

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

Without question, leaders want the best for all pupils. They want them to achieve the greatest personal independence possible. They would like pupils to gain essential skills to prepare them for their future. They want to encourage pupils to be healthy. The curriculum enables most pupils to achieve these aims. Some subjects within the curriculum are not as well organised and planned as others. This means that some pupils do not build their knowledge as effectively as they could. For example, some are not taught all of the key skills in physical education (PE) to enable them to perform well in team games. Leaders have already started to address this through a full review of the

curriculum.

Teachers find out about what pupils can already do before teaching them something new. They use this information to pinpoint what pupils need to be able to know and do. They design appealing learning tasks that are bespoke to each pupil. Teachers blend objectives from individual pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans into their planning. Sometimes, though, teachers do not use assessment as effectively as they could to inform what they plan to teach.

Learning in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is particularly strong. Similarly, the specialist curriculum for pupils with the most complex needs is very effective. Developing pupils' communication is a central theme in the school's curriculum. This is done well. Pupils use a wide range of resources confidently to assist with their communication. For example, some pupils use eye gaze technology to control an on/off switch. This helps pupils to develop their independence.

The school recognises the importance of reading. However, there is a lack of consistency in the way that it is taught. Many aspects of early reading are taught well, using a range of methods suited to pupils' needs. However, this is not the case with the teaching of phonics because of wide variation in staff's subject knowledge. This means that some pupils do not benefit from good teaching in reading.

Leaders provide pupils with a variety of experiences that support their personal development. This includes things like residential trips and visits to places of cultural interest. These activities help to develop well-rounded, considerate young people who can make a positive contribution to society. Their preparation for the world of work is impressive. Pupils undertake mock job interviews to help them improve their employability skills. Many post-16 students acquire functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics. This helps them secure places in further education. Last year, all students progressed on to education, employment or training.

Pupils show genuine care for each other. They get on with their tasks in class and rarely cause any bother to other pupils. They understand what is expected of them in terms of their behaviour. When pupils do make wrong choices, staff manage this well. This means that learning takes place with few interruptions. The majority of parents and carers have very positive things to say about the school. 'A wonderful, happy, fun learning environment' was one comment that typified the views of many parents.

School governance has some weaknesses. Governors do not have a completely accurate view of how well the school is performing. Governors recognise where they need to improve and have already started to make changes to their practice.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that keeping pupils safe from harm is given the highest priority. They make sure that staff are appropriately trained to spot and manage any safeguarding

concerns. Staff are vigilant. When they recognise that a pupil may be at risk, they take the necessary action, without delay, to keep them safe. The school works very well with other agencies. Staff understand the additional risks that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) face. Pupils learn about how to manage risk and stay safe, both online and offline.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Leaders know that parts of the curriculum are taught less successfully than others. Several subjects, including information and communication technology and PE, do not have a well-organised sequence of learning. This means that pupils do not acquire all of the knowledge to help them make sense of future learning. Subject leaders need to design units of work that enable pupils to build their understanding over time.
- The teaching of phonics is not as effective as it could be because a few staff do not have a strong understanding of how to teach phonics well. This means that some pupils do not learn to blend sounds as well as they should. There is also inconsistency in the order that phonics is taught. Leaders need to ensure that all staff who teach phonics are equipped with good subject knowledge so that they can teach it well. Leaders should also make sure that there is a clear, agreed progression in the order that sounds are taught.
- Teachers use several different systems to assess pupils' work. However, there are weaknesses in the school's assessment system. Checks on learning do not always give teachers the information they need to plan activities that precisely meet pupils' needs. Leaders need to ensure that they refine their approach to assessment so it matches the curriculum and better informs teaching.
- Governors and trustees do not know the school as well as they should. They do not have enough information to make informed judgements about how well the school is performing. Governors need to ensure that they strengthen the ways they hold leaders to account.

## **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 second section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Barrs Court School, to be outstanding in May 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 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	139607
<b>Local authority</b>	Herefordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10111817
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	114
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	42
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Julie Cohn
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lisa Appleton
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.barrscourtschool.co.uk">www.barrscourtschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	8 March 2016

## Information about this school

- The school caters mainly for pupils with severe learning difficulties and/or complex needs. It also caters for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. All pupils who attend the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school uses one alternative provider, The Houghton Project, located in Bodenham, Herefordshire.
- The school is on a split site, with post-16 students located in 'The Hub'. This is a short walk from the main school site.
- The school does not have a religious character.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and subject leaders. The inspectors also met with one trustee (who was also the chair of the governing body) and two other members of the governing body.
- The inspectors considered the 56 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 11 responses to the Ofsted pupil survey. Also taken into account were the 19 responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey and 15 free-text comments.
- Subjects considered as part of this inspection were English, PSHE education, PE/physical development and information and communication technology. Inspectors carried out lesson visits to see most of these subjects being taught and looked at pupils' work. Inspectors talked to pupils and students about their work. They spoke to teachers who taught these subjects and held discussions with subject leaders. Inspectors listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors talked to pupils and students to gather their views about their learning, how safe they felt and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors examined safeguarding arrangements by reviewing electronic safeguarding records, checking the safety of the school site, checking arrangements in relation to the alternative provision, talking to staff and pupils about how they keep safe and checking the school's single central record. An inspector met with the school's designated safeguarding lead.

## Inspection team

Tim Hill, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Malcolm Willis

Ofsted Inspector

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