

Inspection of an outstanding school: Wigston Birkett House Community Special School

Station Road, Wigston, Leics LE18 2DT

Inspection dates:

12–13 November 2019

Outcome

Wigston Birkett House Community Special 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 are happy in the school. The singing assembly at the end of each afternoon brings the school together. Pupils leave the school at the end of the day happy and smiling. The adults in the school talk to the pupils in a kind and gentle way. Pupils behave well. They want to learn and play. Pupils like learning with the adults in the room. Sometimes some pupils shout and are noisy. When this happens, the teachers help pupils to calm down. Pupils feel safe in the school. They say that there is rarely any bullying. They are kind to each other.

Teachers want pupils to do well. They make sure that activities help pupils to develop as much as possible. They help pupils to achieve qualifications when they can. Staff want pupils to be able to live well in the world. The older pupils enjoy the opportunities to take part in real-life situations, such as running the school radio and working in Fox Lodge, the school café. Staff help pupils to move into appropriate placements when they leave the school, such as enrolling in college courses. Pupils are confident to take their next steps. Pupils do not learn as well as they could across the curriculum because not all subjects are well planned.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum that is ambitious for all pupils. Teachers plan activities to help each pupil to develop and reach their potential. Some pupils achieve qualifications such as GCSEs and functional skills awards. Others develop their communication skills and learn essential life skills that prepare them to be independent. All pupils achieve well.

Pupils learn about a wide range of subjects. Teachers use the national curriculum subjects to help pupils develop communication skills. For example, in religious education (RE), pupils learn about the religions of the world. They learn about Diwali and the stories about Jesus. Inspectors saw pupils enjoying listening to these stories. Teachers used this activity to help pupils to learn individual letters and words.

The plans for some subjects are clear and well thought out. They set out what pupils will learn and in what order. This works particularly well for reading and communication. Teachers plan what letters and sounds pupils will learn and when in the year they will learn them. Teachers select books that are suitable for pupils' ages and interests, such as the Paddington Bear and Harry Potter series of books. They make sure that these books match the letters and sounds that pupils know. This helps the pupils to read and communicate better.

In some subjects teachers are not clear about how each topic will build pupils' knowledge ready for the next. Therefore, some pupils do not learn as much as they could. For example, in mathematics, pupils sometimes do work that they have already understood instead of learning new topics that will help them to know more. Sometimes in RE pupils experience a lot of new information, but it is not clear how different ideas and topics link together.

Teachers use pupils' individual education, health and care (EHC) plans well to support pupils' needs. For example, they make sure that pupils have opportunities to practise skills that are identified in their plans. They make sure that activities match pupils' interests and aspirations, as identified in their EHC plans. However, curriculum plans do not consider pupils' targets as well as they should.

The school does a good job in helping pupils understand the world around them. The teachers show the children the best that the world has to offer to them. Older pupils are treated as adults and given responsibilities to help them to develop their independence. Pupils learn about what is best about themselves and how that can be attractive to an employer. The school helps the pupils to think of others. They help the pupils to be kind to each other.

Pupils usually behave well and work hard. When pupils become frustrated or upset, the adults in the school are very careful to listen to them and help them to calm down. Staff have been trained in managing pupils' behaviour, without using physical restraint. Inspectors saw staff dealing with challenging behaviour well.

Governors in the school understand how well it is doing and what the school needs to improve. Teachers feel supported by leaders. Staff say that leaders consider their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils say that they feel safe. They know who they would talk to if there was a problem at home or at school. Pupils trust the adults in the school to act in their interests.

Staff are well trained. They know how to spot potential signs of abuse and how to report concerns. Staff understand how to follow up their concerns. Staff are vigilant in their approach to keeping children safe.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. For example, they understand how to use the internet safely.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- EHC plan targets are appropriate and reviewed on a regular basis. Staff make sure that pupils achieve well in the identified areas. However, it is not clear how pupils' targets relate to leaders' curricular intent. Leaders should ensure that curriculum plans and the targets on EHC plans are considered in conjunction so that pupils achieve as well as possible in all subjects.
- Some subjects, such as reading and communication, are coherently planned and sequenced. This helps pupils build their knowledge. This is not the case for all subjects, meaning that pupils do not learn as well as they could across the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that curriculum plans for all subjects clearly identify what pupils should learn, and by when, so that they achieve the curriculum aim.

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 Wigston Birkett House Community Special School to be outstanding on 12–14 May 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	138935
Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	10087294
Type of school	All-through special school
School category	Academy special converter
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	209
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Andy McQuaid
Headteacher	Chris White
Website	www.birketthouse.leics.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–14 May 2015

Information about this school

- The school provides education for pupils with severe and moderate learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, autism and sensory impairment. All pupils have EHC plans.
- The school operates on three sites: Wigston Birkett House, and centres at Countesthorpe Leysland Community College and Thomas Estley Community College. The school moved into the Wigston Birkett House site in September 2017.
- The school’s residential provision closed in September 2017.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- We visited all three sites. We carried out deep dives on each site. The subjects considered as part of deep dives were: reading and communication, mathematics,

information technology and RE. We met with subject leaders and teachers. We visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke with pupils.

- We met with the school's designated safeguarding leader and spoke with staff about their understanding of safeguarding arrangements. The lead inspector checked the school's records of staff recruitment and the suitability of staff to work with children.

Inspection team

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