

Inspection of an outstanding school: Wargrave House School

449 Wargrave Road, Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside WA12 8RS

Inspection dates:

17–18 December 2019

Outcome

Wargrave House 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 like coming to this school. They make friends, feel well supported by adults and enjoy the wealth of activities that are on offer. This is the first time that some pupils have felt that they have 'fitted in' at a school. They recognise each other's strengths and challenges. Nobody judges anyone. Pupils treat each other with tolerance and respect.

Teachers want the best for pupils. However, their high ambitions are not always realised. This is because weaknesses in the previous curriculum have led to gaps in pupils' learning. This hinders their achievement.

Teachers set clear expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils who struggle to self-regulate get the extra support that they need. Pupils like earning tokens. These reward important qualities such as kindness. Pupils trust staff to keep them safe. Pupils are confident that staff will deal with any incidents of bullying effectively.

Pupils enjoy going out into the community. Younger pupils like shopping for their class snacks. Older pupils look forward to helping out at a local community club.

The 'daily mile' gets the school day off to a good start. Pupils burn off excess energy after their long journeys to school. This helps them settle quickly to their learning.

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

The recently appointed governors, chief executive officer (CEO) and senior leaders have an accurate view of the school's performance. They have taken quick and effective action to improve the school. They have strengthened safeguarding procedures and begun to set up a meaningful training programme for staff. Most importantly, these leaders have gained the trust and support of staff following a turbulent time in the school's recent history.

Staff are delighted by the improvements that leaders have made. They agree that Wargrave House School is a good place to work. Staff share leaders' ambitious vision to improve the school. The actions that leaders are taking mean that staff have to work harder. However, staff feel well supported to manage their workloads. They also believe that the benefits brought about by these changes are worth the extra work.

Until very recently, the school's curriculum was not well planned. It did not help teachers to know what should be taught and when. At times, this led to teachers missing out chunks of important learning. Sometimes, teachers moved too quickly through a series of lessons before pupils had the chance to really grasp new knowledge. As a result, pupils in the school have gaps in their learning. This hinders their progress.

A new academic curriculum is now in place. This complements the successful specialist therapy and behaviour programmes that the school offers. Each pupil has an appropriate learning plan based on their education, health and care (EHC) plans. These programmes help pupils overcome their barriers to learning and achieve their personal targets. For example, speech and language therapy programmes enable pupils to develop functional communication, language and social skills.

The new curriculum enables each pupil to work at the right stage and pace for them. Curriculum planning makes sure that each pupil builds on what they already know and can do. This is helping some pupils to make up for lost learning in the past. It also means that the wide range of pupils' needs and abilities are being met. Despite this positive change, the curriculum does not yet take enough account of each pupil's age as well as their stage of development. In personal, social and health education (PSHE), for example, pupils might not get information about puberty at the time when it is most needed. In addition, some staff have not kept up to date with their subject-specific knowledge. This prevents them from delivering the planned curriculum as effectively as they might.

Leaders want all pupils to develop a love of reading. Pupils are responding well to this ambition. They are showing a greater interest in reading. They like the new library books. These match their reading stage and interests well. Some older pupils are avid readers. These pupils get huge pleasure from 'curling up with a book'. Some teaching staff have received specialist training to develop the phonics knowledge and early reading skills of younger pupils. They are using this training appropriately to spot when pupils struggle to read accurately and fluently. They take action to help pupils become confident readers.

Pupils in key stage 4 and students in the sixth form work towards qualifications and external accreditation. They each have a personalised programme that supports them towards greater independence and employability. For example, some sixth-form students have set up and run a community café. They take orders, serve customers and manage money.

Leaders are determined that pupils are well prepared for adulthood. Over the past three years, all pupils have moved on successfully to further education at the end of key stage 4.

Teaching staff are adept at spotting any changes to pupils' behaviour. They make sure

that pupils use the 'zones of regulation' to recognise and manage their moods. Incidents of bullying are rare. Leaders make sure that all incidents are recorded and reported. They make good use of this information to prevent any potential issues emerging.

Leaders are developing the range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities at the school. Pupils now take part in sports matches and tournaments against other schools. Older pupils organise fundraising events for local and national charities. Younger pupils enjoy table tennis and computing clubs. Assembly themes are wide-ranging, from anti-bullying to the general election.

Governors have appointed members with suitable skills, experience and expertise. This means that they provide appropriate challenge and support to school leaders. Governors have sought external training to improve their effectiveness further. They carry out a range of activities to reassure themselves that the school is well run.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have reviewed and revised the school's safeguarding arrangements. They have put in place robust systems and procedures. All staff are up to date with their training. Safeguarding is routinely discussed as part of weekly staff briefings. This helps staff to be confident and competent in carrying out their responsibilities. The school works well with external agencies. This means that pupils and their families get the help and support that they need. Leaders carry out thorough checks to make sure that staff are suitable to work with children.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum plans set out pupils' learning by stage of development. This means that pupils sometimes miss out on some key knowledge specific to their age in some subjects, such as PSHE. There are also gaps in pupils' knowledge that hinder their learning. Leaders should review the new curriculum further to make sure that learning is well organised for pupils' chronological age and developmental stage. They should ensure that gaps in pupils' learning are addressed.
- Teaching staff have not kept up to date with their subject-specific training. This means that the curriculum is not delivered as well as it might be. Pupils' learning is not always planned. Leaders need to ensure that all teaching staff access appropriate subject-specific training, so that they can deliver the planned curriculum and build pupils' knowledge over time.

Background

When we have judged a special 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 Wargrave House School to be outstanding on 5–6 November 2014.

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	134888
Local authority	St Helens
Inspection number	10045853
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	52
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Steve Whalley
Headteacher	Stuart Jamieson
Website	www.wargravehouse.com
Date of previous inspection	5–6 November 2014

Information about this school

- All pupils have an EHC plan. All pupils have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. Most pupils also have learning difficulties. A number of pupils join the school at times other than the start of key stages 1, 3 and 5.
- The school uses no alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- During the inspection, we held meetings with senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers and support staff. We spoke with the CEO, representatives of placing local authority and three members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- We spoke to staff about their workload and well-being.
- We considered the 20 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire.
- We considered the 29 responses to Ofsted's staff survey. We also met with groups of

staff and pupils.

- We met with the people responsible for safeguarding in the school. We scrutinised a wide range of documentation and spoke with staff, pupils and parents about safeguarding.
- We observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and around school.
- As part of this inspection, we considered how leaders plan and organise the reading, physical education and personal, social and health education curriculums. We spoke to teachers and subject leaders. We visited lessons with leaders. We talked with pupils about their learning and looked at the work in their books, as well as other evidence of their learning.
- For the school's next section 5 inspection, inspectors recommend the focus of the deep dives might be on reading, mathematics, PSHE and the computing curriculums.

Inspection team

Pippa Jackson Maitland, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Gary Kelly

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
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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