

Inspection of a good school: Mary Hare School

Arlington Manor, Snelsmore Common, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 3BQ

Inspection dates: 11–12 February 2020

Outcome

Mary Hare School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud of their school and talk with excitement and passion about all aspects of their education here. Their enthusiasm for learning and appreciation of the opportunities the school provides are both heartening and humbling. They like that all pupils are 'the same' and talk of a strong sense of belonging. Some pupils told inspectors that this was the first school that they had attended that fully understood their needs. One told the lead inspector that the school had changed his life, giving him the confidence to talk after 11 years of silence.

Expectations of behaviour and engagement in learning are high at Mary Hare. Pupils readily admit to falling out with each other on occasion. They put this down to a range of reasons, including frustrations in communicating. They reflected that developing relationships can be tough at times because of this, but that staff are always there to help when needed. They also related that teachers can sometimes be 'annoying' but linked this to high aspirations and that staff want them to succeed.

Although this inspection focused on the quality of education the school provides, pupils are particularly positive about their experiences in the residential provision.

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

Leaders and governors have worked hard to improve the school since the last inspection. They are determined that the school will not stand still. Plans to improve some aspects of provision are well developed. These include plans to provide new state-of-the-art facilities to improve the learning environment, resources and accommodation for primary-aged pupils. Leaders have also started to address the workload issues identified by some staff.

Visits to classrooms showed them to be happy places with a high degree of consistency in pupils' routines and teachers' classroom practice. The curriculum is well suited to pupils here. It takes into account their complex needs very well. Consequently, pupils behave well. This includes in the primary, secondary and sixth-form phases of the school.

The school is unique in that pupils with severe and profound hearing impairments are expected to talk and not use sign language in classrooms. However, in developing pupils' early reading skills, a form of visual phonics is also used alongside a more traditional phonics scheme. Staff are skilled at delivering phonics. Pupils love reading and happily recalled their favourite books and authors when talking to the lead inspector. Additional resources have been purchased recently. Pupils enjoy using these. However, resources could be used more effectively to develop pupils' early reading skills.

Mathematics is taught well. Classroom visits and discussions with staff and pupils showed that the planned curriculum for mathematics is sequenced well. Examples of pupils' work showed that pupils build a clear hierarchy of knowledge as they move through the school, including in the sixth form. Teachers have a clear understanding of pupils' prior learning and where there are gaps. They use this knowledge to plan learning along 'ladders' of knowledge and skills which they expect pupils to know and understand. This ensures that most pupils achieve well in mathematics, no matter which pathway they follow.

The school uses the national curriculum as a starting point for what pupils are taught. Curriculum leaders have a clear understanding of what should be taught and when. However, staff are very conscious that many pupils arrive at the school with big gaps in their knowledge. Pupils' previous experiences of being taught subjects such as art and design and physical education are often varied, for instance. Pupils relate that their needs were often not catered for very well in previous schools and also shared that they thought that sometimes their curriculum was narrowed in previous schools. Consequently, staff are skilled at planning learning that fills gaps as well as engaging and enthusing pupils well. Most staff are subject specialists. Some work across both sites of the school. Pupils in the primary phase have recently started to enjoy having specialist staff to teach them dance. All are specialist teachers of the deaf, or currently training to be.

Pupils' wider needs, including their social and emotional development, are catered for well at the school. Staff work hard at building pupils' resilience and confidence. Pupils themselves understand the importance of developing their communication skills so that they can be successful in the future. Preparing pupils for life after leaving Mary Hare underpins every aspect of the secondary and sixth form-phases. School leaders give high importance to celebrating the successes of past pupils, many of whom have achieved well in a wide range of fields.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The culture to keep pupils safe is strong because staff understand the complex needs of pupils very well. Pastoral care and pupils' social and emotional development are strong. Specialist staff are employed to support pupils' access to the curriculum, as well as ensuring that the welfare, health and safety of pupils are given the highest priority.

Partnerships with outside agencies are positive. Record-keeping is detailed and consistent. Policies and procedures are followed well. Staff training focuses on the right things,

including identifying and understanding the very specific additional risks that pupils who attend this school face.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Phonics provision is generally effective because staff are experts in their fields and have the skills and classroom resources required to develop pupils' early reading skills well. Although phonics is taught daily and staff monitor pupils' achievements well, new resources are not yet being fully utilised. Simply put, pupils need wider access to the phonics books they use in the classroom when they go home or when in the school's residential provision. This will enable pupils to develop their early reading skills more effectively and to become fluent readers sooner.
- Leaders have started to address concerns about staff workload. Of 59 staff who completed the staff survey, 20 left written comments about this issue. While the very large majority of staff who left comments were positive and acknowledged leaders' efforts in this area, some still expressed concerns. Leaders were able to share their work in this area with inspectors. However, they need to redouble their efforts to improve this aspect of the school. This will ensure that staff feel respected and positively motivated, as well as ensuring that their expertise is utilised effectively for the benefit of pupils across the school.

Background

When we have judged a special school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 school to be good on 29–30 June 2016.

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 the school and 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	110180
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10133178
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
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	233
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	66
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Andrew Strivens
Principal	Peter Gale
Website	www.maryhare.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	29–30 June 2016

Information about this school

- Mary Hare School is a non-maintained residential special school for pupils who have moderate, severe or profound deafness. The residential provision was not part of this inspection.
- Most pupils have cochlear implants and/or hearing aids. They are all taught to use spoken English throughout the school day.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan for their deafness. A large number of pupils have special educational needs in addition to their deafness.
- The school is based on two sites. The primary school site caters for pupils aged from five to 11. The secondary school site caters for pupils aged from 11 to 19. Although registered for pupils aged four to 19, there were no children in the early years foundation stage at the time of the inspection.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- We held a wide range of meetings during the inspection. These included meetings with leaders, teaching and support staff, and pupils. The lead inspector met with the chair of governors and one other governor. He also talked to representatives from two different local authorities who place pupils at the school.
- When considering the quality of the curriculum, we did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, art and design, and physical education. Deep dives included visiting lessons on both sites of the school, looking at pupils' work, and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils about how teaching in these subjects builds on pupils' knowledge over time. The lead inspector also heard pupils read.
- We took into account 80 responses to Ofsted's online parent survey and accompanying free-text messages. We also reviewed the 59 responses to the online staff survey. We received one letter from a parent during the inspection.
- Throughout the inspection we assessed the school's culture to keep pupils safe. A wide range of documentation was considered, including policies and leaders' self-evaluation and development planning. Records of the work of the governing body were reviewed. The single central record of checks on the suitability of adults to work with children was also scrutinised, along with a wide range of other records relating to the school's work to safeguard pupils.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Hilary Goddard

Ofsted Inspector

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