

Inspection of a good school: Fort Royal

Wyld's Lane, Worcester, Worcestershire WR5 1DR

Inspection dates:

28 and 29 September 2021

Outcome

Fort Royal continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Fort Royal is a happy school. Staff get to know pupils and their families well. They make sure that pupils are safe and well cared for. One parent remarked: 'I couldn't ask for better.' Staff work closely with other agencies, such as speech and language therapy, to ensure that pupils get the right support to improve their language and communication skills. Communication systems, such as signing, communication books and spoken language, are well established. Staff weave them into daily practice skilfully to help pupils communicate effectively.

Everyone is confident that there is no bullying in the school. Pupils are closely supervised so any fallouts between individuals are quickly sorted. Pupils are helped to learn to manage their own behaviour well.

Pupils are getting on well with their learning. Staff have been able to help some of the most able pupils to transfer to a mainstream school. However, some pupils could be helped to practise their handwriting and reading better. Previously, pupils have enjoyed activities in the community to help develop their understanding of the world. Some of these activities have been stopped because of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Leaders have made plans to restart these activities now local restrictions have eased.

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

Staff have a good understanding of pupils' abilities. They have built a curriculum that captures pupils' interests. Teachers plan activities that are well matched to pupils' needs. Staff think creatively when planning these activities. They use a range of interesting resources and information technology. They check pupils' understanding regularly. Pupils are supported well to manage their behaviour in lessons. Staff celebrate and reward the positive behaviour choices pupils make. If pupils need help to regulate their behaviour, staff step in quickly and calmly to refocus pupils. They make sure that little learning time is lost.

Leaders are in the process of reviewing and improving their wider curriculum. In some subjects, leaders have not set out clearly how key concepts will be developed over time. They are not clear enough about what pupils need to know before they begin new

learning. Staff have recently introduced workbooks to record individual achievements in subjects other than English and mathematics. They want pupils to be able to have a record of work they have completed. This will help pupils revisit their learning and help them remember more over time.

Leaders have improved their approach to the teaching of early reading. Pupils are supported to develop a love of books, regardless of their level of development. They use multi-sensory approaches for pupils at an early stage of development. Pupils told inspectors about their enjoyment of reading books with adults, such as 'James and the Giant Peach' and 'The Three Little Pigs', at school and home. Limited space in the school means that pupils must rely on books from reading trolleys and small reading areas in the classroom. Some books are in better condition than others.

Staff have benefited from training in phonics. They plan activities that match pupils' phonics levels. Pupils at the earliest stages of phonics enjoy songs, rhymes and turn-taking games. Pupils who are learning to decode words usually have a reading book matched to the sounds that they know. However, approaches to supporting pupils read can vary. Sometimes, staff confuse activities of decoding and understanding of stories. This results in pupils' memories becoming overloaded because they are having to think about too many things at the same time. Due to COVID-19, pupils have not been able to take phonics reading books home. Leaders want to make sure that parents and carers are given suitable guidance. They are planning a workshop for parents before books are sent home.

Pupils experience a broad range of experiences beyond the main curriculum. Pupils are helped to develop their social and moral understanding by taking part in activities such as the school council. They can make choices and suggestions about things that are important to them, such as the use of paper rather than plastic straws, or a vote on their preferred piece of new playground equipment. Staff value pupils' views. Pupils are given opportunities to comment on issues such as their well-being, or the new personal, health and social education curriculum. Pupils are being well prepared for the next stage of their education, from class to class or from one school to another.

Governors are mindful of staff workload. They are working with senior leaders to make sure that the school's improvement priorities are achievable and measurable. Most staff feel that leaders are appreciative of their workload and say that it is manageable. Staff are very supportive of each other, and the sharing of resources and good practice enables them to work effectively, as a team. Staff speak positively about leaders' support for their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff receive up-to-date training and updates about all aspects of safeguarding. They know how to report concerns, and to whom. Staff are aware of the additional risks that pupils may face. They know that some pupils cannot speak for themselves, so they keep a

close eye on them. Designated safeguarding leads meet frequently to discuss and identify any emerging concerns and seek extra support for pupils and families.

Governors are due to complete updated safeguarding training very soon to ensure that they are familiar with their statutory duties. Some minor administrative gaps on the school's single central record were addressed during the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not have a whole-school agreed approach to the teaching of handwriting. As a result, approaches are ad hoc and do not help pupils develop their handwriting skills well enough. Leaders should ensure that there is a whole-school agreed approach to the teaching of handwriting.
- When listening to early readers decode words in books, staff can overload pupils' working memories with decoding and comprehension tasks. Leaders should make sure that when pupils are reading phonics books, staff have a clear focus on decoding words. Opportunities to read phonics books at home should be extended as this is not in place.
- Some concepts in subjects in the wider curriculum are not sequenced well enough, nor pupils' prior learning considered. As a result, the transitional arrangements have been applied. Leaders should take steps to ensure that all subjects are suitably sequenced, with concepts identified and mapped out across each key stage.

Background

When we have judged a 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 or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in January 2013.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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	131534
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	10200052
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	262
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Andrew Mills
Headteacher	Ed Francis
Website	http://www.fortroyal.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 September 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Fort Royal has capacity for 200 pupils, set out on the Department for Education's 'Get information about schools' website. The school is currently operating well over capacity. Class sizes are increasing. Leaders and local authority officers are in discussion about how to alleviate the pressure on the school's accommodation. This needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- The school admits children from the age of two years to its nursery assessment centre. Children may be assessed for an education, health and care plan. Some, but not all children transfer to Fort Royal at the end of the assessment period.
- Leaders have noticed that more pupils with complex needs and autism spectrum disorder are now being admitted to the school.
- A very small number of pupils attend alternative provision for half a day a week, accompanied by their parents.
- The governing body has formed a 'soft collaboration' with the school's secondary feeder school, Regency High School.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken this into account in the evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and senior leaders during this inspection. The lead inspector spoke to the school's improvement partner and the local authority improvement adviser on the telephone. She held a meeting with two governor representatives, and the chair of the governing body joined the meeting remotely.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, language and communication, and geography. They met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector observed a small number of early readers reading to a familiar adult. She also looked at other curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about these.
- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and the headteacher, (who is a deputy safeguarding lead), to discuss safeguarding matters. She looked at records of training, and discussed how individual concerns are recorded, reported and followed up. She checked the school's central record of pre-employment checks that are carried out on staff.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the staff and pupil surveys, and the responses to the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View. The views expressed in the free-text responses were taken into account.

Inspection team

Deb Jenkins, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Janet Lewis

Ofsted Inspector

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