

Inspection of Bishopswood School

Grove Road, Reading RG4 9RH

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 November 2021

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are cared for well by adults at this school. However, leaders do not do enough to ensure that pupils are safe. Staff, leaders and governors do not take sufficient collective ownership of safeguarding in the school. They are too reliant on others taking action when potential risks to pupils are identified. Some staff say that pupils are not safe because, at times, there are too few adults available to look after them.

Staff know pupils well. They understand pupils' individual special educational needs and/or disabilities. They promote language and communication as part of their daily work. Their work is kind and thoughtful.

Pupils trust the adults who care for them. Relationships are positive. Learning about recognising and managing emotions and about interacting with others is integral to pupils' daily work. This helps pupils learn to be kind and tolerant towards each other.

Leaders are suitably aspirational about what they want pupils to achieve by the time they leave the school. For some pupils, these aspirations translate into an appropriately ambitious curriculum. For others, this ambition becomes diluted because leaders and staff focus too much on what comes next rather than the long-term destination that pupils are aiming for.

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

Leaders and governors are not effective in their collective roles. Their best intentions do not translate successfully into the school's daily work. Consequently, weaknesses in safeguarding practice have gone unchecked and other priorities for improvement have not been addressed quickly enough. Some statutory obligations have not been met, such as around the publication of an accessibility plan and arrangements for providing relationships and sex education. Leaders are receptive to advice and support, such as from the local authority. They have taken initial steps to address the weaknesses identified, but do not always see these for themselves. The pace of work to fully implement the planned curriculum has been impeded by staffing turbulence, which is having a negative impact on staff workload and well-being.

Leaders want pupils to do their best. Their aspirations for what pupils could achieve by the end of Year 11 are suitably high. Their plans for the intended curriculum set out an appropriate path towards achieving these goals. They provide opportunities for pupils to improve their communication skills, physical development and problem-solving ability. However, these plans are not sufficiently established in practice. Day-to-day work is overly focused on pupils' short-term development, rather than having suitably ambitious end goals in mind. Consequently, over time, some pupils do not move through the intended curriculum as rapidly as they could.

Staff work well with pupils, treating them with care and respect. They understand pupils' learning and welfare needs. They are alert to pupils' short-term goals,

recognising when these have been achieved and identifying next steps appropriately. This helps to guide the choice of learning activities that are selected for pupils to engage with.

Language and communication are promoted well throughout the school. Adults use sign language and pictorial communication methods with confidence. Pupils, particularly the youngest ones, are persistently encouraged to communicate their needs, wants and feelings. This helps pupils to feel safe and become more independent. Where appropriate, phonics is taught effectively by knowledgeable adults. Older pupils are proud of their emerging reading skills. Younger pupils enjoy sharing books and stories as part of their learning.

Adults typically manage pupils' behaviour well. The atmosphere around the school is warm and nurturing. However, leaders do not pay enough attention to patterns in pupils' behaviour. This prevents them from identifying what may be causing pockets of unsettled behaviour, and therefore from taking action. The same is true for leaders' monitoring of pupils' attendance and punctuality. Their work is reactive rather than proactive.

Pupils' personal development is a key part of the school's work. Leaders understand the importance of pupils learning how to interact with others and become more independent. This is threaded through pupils' daily work. Adults make the most of opportunities for pupils to engage with the community, for example through visits to the local library and shops. Careers information, advice and guidance for older pupils is suitably focused on appropriate onward destinations. Some aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development are better planned for than others. For instance, chances for pupils' spiritual development beyond an understanding of religion are not well thought out. The SMSC curriculum is too reactive to opportunities that arise, rather than being deliberately planned with pupils' wider needs in mind.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

There are weaknesses in the school's safeguarding culture, actions and record-keeping. Staff and governors do not understand their collective and individual responsibilities well enough. Consequently, adults are too quick to relinquish their ownership of concerns that may arise about pupils. Records do not clearly and routinely identify what actions leaders have taken. Governors do not check carefully enough that safeguarding work is suitably robust. All of this increases the potential risk to pupils.

Leaders have recently begun to address weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements. Staff have received comprehensive training, and can describe potential risk to be alert to, including those risks linked to pupils' particular needs. Records are being reviewed, to check that they are comprehensive. Nevertheless, there is further work to do.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- While leaders and teachers plan learning that builds on what pupils know and can do, they do not routinely take account of what they want pupils to achieve by the end of Year 11. Consequently, curriculum planning is not ambitious enough for some groups of pupils. Leaders should ensure that current work to develop the curriculum is carried out promptly and builds clearly and consciously towards ambitious goals for all pupils.
- Leaders are not sufficiently alert to patterns in pupils' attendance, punctuality and behaviour. As a result, they do not act quickly enough to tackle the underlying reasons when any of these are not good enough. Leaders should make sure that their checks on attendance, punctuality and behaviour enable them to promptly identify and act on emerging issues.
- Plans for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are too reactive, rather than being deliberately planned to meet pupils' needs. In particular, leaders do not understand well enough how to contribute to pupils' spiritual development. Leaders should ensure that pupils have planned and deliberate chances to be appropriately reflective about the world around them and about their own thoughts and views.
- Despite recent improvement work, safeguarding arrangements are ineffective. Incomplete records and a lack of shared ownership contribute to a poor safeguarding culture in the school. Leaders and governors must make sure that safeguarding duties are fully understood and acted on, with careful records kept of the actions taken.
- Leaders and governors are not sufficiently aware of the school's weaknesses. They rely too heavily on support, such as from the local authority, to identify priorities for improvement. Leaders should develop their collective knowledge about standards in the school, so that they can be more proactive in prioritising school improvement work.
- Governors do not understand their collective role well enough. They have not ensured that all of their legal duties are met. Over time, they have not held leaders to account for standards in the school. Governors should ensure that they are suitably trained to understand and carry out their duties effectively.
- Staff, leaders and governors do not have a shared understanding of the school's aims. Consequently, some are not clear about their role in moving the school forward towards those aims. Leaders and governors should make sure that all those involved in the life of the school understand how their work contributes meaningfully to provision for pupils, so that standards in the school improve quickly.

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	123345
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10202567
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Rachel Helliwell
Headteacher	Janet Kellett
Website	www.bishopswoodschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	16 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Bishopswood provides education to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, some of which are profound and multiple. Almost half of pupils are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. A similar proportion have significant communication difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school admits pupils aged from two to 16 years. Currently, the age range of pupils on roll at the school is five to 16 years.
- Bishopswood special school operates from three separate sites. There is another maintained school or academy situated on each of these sites, each of which is registered, led and managed separately from Bishopswood.
- There is an after-school club on site at Bishopswood's main school site, attended by a small number of pupils from the school. This club also provides holiday club facilities for Bishopswood pupils. Both of these provisions are managed by Bishopswood's governing body.
- The headteacher is currently absent from school. At the time of this inspection, one of the assistant headteachers was responsible for the day-to-day running of the school.

- Since the last time that the school was inspected, there have been changes to leadership and governance personnel. One of the assistant headteachers joined the school in spring 2020, shortly before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The chair of governors stepped down from their post in summer 2021. At that point, the vice-chair of governors became acting chair of governors.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships. This aspect of school provision takes appropriate account of pupils' specific and complex needs, focusing on what all relevant parties agree is in pupils' best interests.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school does not have any particular religious character.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspectors deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

- The inspection was carried out following a complaint made to Ofsted that raised serious concerns. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the whole-school issues that were raised. Inspectors sought to establish whether safeguarding arrangements were effective, whether physical intervention was being used appropriately by staff and whether leadership and management were effective.
- Inspectors met with the acting headteacher and assistant headteacher, and separately with the acting chair of governors. They discussed a range of aspects of the school's provision and looked at relevant documentation. The lead inspector also spoke with two representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into these subjects: language and communication, physical development, thinking and problem-solving, and personal, social and health education. This involved talking with leaders and teachers about curriculum plans for these subjects, then visiting lessons and, where appropriate, speaking to pupils and staff about learning and looking at relevant work.

- The school's safeguarding arrangements were scrutinised. Inspectors reviewed staff training, how concerns are logged and acted on, and how adults working in the school are vetted.
- Inspectors sought the views of staff via responses to an online survey. They spoke to pupils throughout the inspection, mostly while adults were present to support pupils' communication needs.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lucy English

Her Majesty's Inspector

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