

Inspection of Batchwood School

Townsend Drive, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 5RP

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 February 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Most Batchwood pupils settle in quickly when they join. Those who find it more difficult to cope with changes are supported well to gain confidence over time. Pupils form positive working relationships with school staff. They know their teachers want the best for them. Consequently, they are typically respectful and responsive to the high expectations promoted across all aspects of school life. On occasions, when a few pupils' behaviour falls short of expectations, they are helped to improve, including those who do not attend school as often as they should.

Pupils enjoy learning in a wide range of subjects, including outdoors in 'bushcraft'. They often speak about art, design and technology, physical education and music as their 'favourites'. The importance of keeping safe, maintaining healthy lifestyles and having respectful relationships are regularly reinforced in different situations. Pupils feel safe in school. They know that bullying and any other type of abuse will not be tolerated. They are clear about whom to speak to if they are worried and trusting of staff to sort things out. Most pupils raise their aspirations for the future from their different starting points. They are well prepared to take their next steps in education, employment and/or training when they leave school.

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

Leaders are as equally ambitious for pupils' academic achievement as they are for their social, emotional and mental health. Consequently, they ensure that Batchwood pupils access a broad and interesting curriculum. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is threaded through all aspects of the school's work.

The range of subjects on offer has increased since the previous inspection. Expectations are high. Pupils are guided to appropriate awards and qualifications, including GCSEs. Typically, they achieve well from their different starting points, often after significant periods away from formal education.

Leaders have thought carefully about the content taught at different stages in each subject. Learning is planned to build on what pupils already know, with regular opportunities to revisit important knowledge and skills so that pupils remember more of the things they have learned over time.

Securing pupils' reading fluency is a high priority. A focus on subject-specific vocabulary and reading together is encouraged in lessons. Year 8 pupils spoke enthusiastically about the characters from their class text of choice, 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time'.

Staff make regular checks on pupils' learning throughout their time in school. Interventions help individuals who need extra support. There is ongoing staff training to ensure that they are confident to support reading catch-up, including in the use of phonics. The school's 'nurture' provision offers bespoke support for younger pupils who need more help to settle in.

Pupils generally behave well. Bullying and other forms of abuse are not tolerated. Relationships are positive. Staff are skilful in spotting signs of anxiety which might lead to challenging behaviour. Effective action diffuses situations quickly in lessons and around the school. While most pupils make significant improvements in their attendance, some do not attend as regularly as they should. This is an ongoing improvement priority for school leaders.

The PSHE curriculum is well planned, with close links to other subjects, including the carefully considered careers education programme. Pupils gain confidence and improve their self-esteem. They are taught how to keep safe, both physically and mentally, and to form healthy relationships. Tolerance and respect for individual differences are routinely promoted. Pupils are prepared effectively to take the next steps beyond school. Most gain places in education, employment and/or training when they leave.

Leaders, including governors, have acted decisively to continue to improve the school since the previous inspection. Staff are well supported. Subject leadership has been strengthened. A few subject leads are new to the role. As part of their ongoing monitoring and review process, they are working to check that subject content is well defined and consistently taught in the most logical order over time. Governors are a skilled team in holding leaders to account for the quality of education the school offers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are appropriately trained so they know what to do if a pupil may be at risk of harm. Leaders ensure that training covers a wide range of important local and national safeguarding concerns, including sexual harassment and gang-related crime. The PSHE curriculum is closely linked to the safeguarding agenda, including in how pupils are taught how to stay safe and to form healthy relationships. Concerns are followed up quickly. The safeguarding team works closely with external agencies to support vulnerable pupils. Leaders ensure that wider support is available, including from the school's on-site psychologists.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- While the planned curriculum is implemented effectively overall, a few subject leads are new to the role. This means that they are still checking that subject content is consistently well defined and routinely taught in the most logical order. Leaders should ensure that new teams have access to any further training needed to continue to secure their quality assurance role over time.
- Although most pupils make significant improvements in their attendance over their time in the school, often from very low starting points, some do not attend

as regularly as they should. This means that they do not achieve as well as they could when they are not in school. Leaders should continue to work closely with pupils and families to minimise the time spent away from lessons so that all pupils are supported to achieve their very best by the time they leave at the end of Year 11.

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	117674
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10200527
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	95
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Dawn Laverick-Brown
Headteacher	Jonathan Kemp
Website	www.batchwood.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	6 and 7 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Batchwood School provides places for boys and girls who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils enter the school at different stages of their secondary education. Most have experienced long periods of disruption to their formal education before they join.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above the national average.
- Almost all pupils are White British.
- The school uses alternative providers to extend the range of vocational curriculum opportunities for pupils in Year 10 and Year 11.
- Since the previous inspection, the seconded executive headteacher, shared with another school, has taken up the substantive Batchwood School headteacher post. A new building has been added, which provides 'nurture' provision for younger pupils who find it more difficult to make the transition to a secondary setting.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the senior leadership team, curriculum leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, designated safeguarding leads, teachers and other school staff.
- The lead inspector also met with a group of governors, including the chair of governors, and spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils around the school at break and lunchtimes. They met with pupils to speak about their school experiences and their work. They also visited lessons jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors carried out in-depth reviews (deep dives) in the following subjects: English, art, science and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and looked at work in pupils' books.
- A range of documentation was checked, including the single central record of pre-employment checks on new staff, safeguarding records and associated school policies.
- Inspectors considered 12 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and 13 free-text comments from parents. Inspectors also took account of 49 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff and one response to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lynda Walker

Ofsted Inspector

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