

Inspection of Severndale Specialist Academy

Woodcote Way, Monkmoor, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY2 5SH

Inspection dates: 15 and 16 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Severndale Specialist Academy is a welcoming and caring community. At the start of the day, pupils are greeted warmly by adults who know them very well. Pupils are happy to come to school. They look forward to meeting friends and the adults they work with. Staff build strong and positive relationships with pupils.

When pupils are together, including at breaktime and lunchtime, they treat each other kindly. Staff keep a close eye on pupils. Any fallouts between pupils are quickly sorted. Pupils behave well, feel safe and enjoy learning.

The school's new leaders are ambitious for all pupils. They have made some important and necessary changes, particularly to improve safeguarding. This means that pupils are now safe and well cared for. They have also made changes to what pupils learn. However, it is still early days. There is much more to do to make sure that all pupils are taught the right things at the right time.

Pupils benefit from a range of opportunities. These include cooking, music therapy, singing groups and drama club. Some pupils take part in lunchtime clubs. They relish these chances. For example, pupils spoke excitedly about a recent dance performance at Shrewsbury Theatre.

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

Leaders have made recent changes to improve the quality of education. They have ensured that pupils learn a wide variety of different subjects. They have also created different curriculum pathways so that pupils with similar needs learn together. This is working well. In some parts of the school, pupils learn knowledge and skills in a well-thought-out order. For instance, pupils in Years 10 and 11 who attend the Mary Webb site learn about simple sentences before learning to write extended noun phrases. However, in other parts of the school, including in the early years and the sixth form, the curriculum does not always build in a logical order. This means that pupils are not always taught the right things at the right time.

Staff know pupils well. They use a range of interesting resources that help involve pupils in their learning. For pupils who have complex needs, teaching and therapies are well coordinated to meet pupils' needs. Physiotherapists advise teachers on how best to position pupils to learn, and how to enable pupils to practise their physical skills alongside their learning.

Staff, pupils and parents all contribute to the annual review of the education, health and care plans (EHCP). In some classrooms, teachers understand the smaller steps that pupils need to take to meet longer term targets. These teachers regularly assess what pupils can do. They use this assessment information well to make changes to pupils' provision as needed. This supports pupils' learning well. However, this effective approach is not consistent across the school.

Leaders want as many pupils as possible to learn to read. However, the teaching of reading is not as good as it needs to be. The school's phonics programme does not set out clearly the order in which pupils should learn sounds. Staff also lack expertise in teaching phonics and overcoming the barriers to reading that some pupils face.

A love of reading is promoted well across the school for all pupils. The school library is a bright environment. Pupils use it well. In the early years, all classrooms include a wide range of books, and the books are located so that they are within easy reach for children. In addition, adults read to pupils every day. Staff tell stories with enthusiasm. Pupils enjoy listening and joining in at story time.

The learning environment across the school, including in the early years and the sixth form, is calm and orderly. Staff work hard to understand what a pupil's behaviour might be communicating and they respond sensitively. As soon as pupils start the school, there is a strong focus on establishing clear routines and on pupils managing their own behaviour. For instance, pupils knew exactly what to do in one classroom when the teacher began singing 'we are going on a listening adventure'.

Leaders are determined that all pupils will learn how to interact positively with others. Leaders have undertaken work to find the most effective ways to enable individual pupils to communicate. These approaches support pupils to develop confidence and independence and to prepare them for their next steps. This was seen to good effect at lunchtime when adults encouraged pupils to make choices about their food. However, not all staff use these agreed communication systems consistently. This means that some pupils do not get enough opportunities to develop their communication skills and make the choices of which they are capable.

Trustees are knowledgeable. They have a good understanding of their role. Since their appointment, trustees have rightly focused on improving the safeguarding culture at the school. As part of their work, they gather the views of parents, pupils and staff. This means that trustees have a clear and accurate picture of safeguarding in the school. Trustees are beginning to hold leaders to account for the quality of education.

Leaders work hard to promote the staff's well-being. Most staff are happy in their roles and want to help leaders to improve the school further.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors take the right actions to keep pupils safe. They make sure that staff know the signs that a pupil may need help. Staff log all concerns. Leaders act on these concerns quickly.

Leaders have implemented strategies to make sure that pupils are able to express any concerns they may have. The 'Three Houses' framework allows all pupils to identify worries safely. Pupils with complex needs have individual communication aids so that they can let adults know if they do not feel safe.

Pupils learn about healthy relationships and keeping safe online. Pupils can identify trusted adults who will listen to them.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Curriculum leaders, including in the early years and the sixth form, have not clearly identified what they want pupils to know and remember over time. This means that pupils do not always learn the things they need to in the right order and at the right time. Leaders should ensure that all curriculum areas are logically sequenced, and taught in the order and way that they intend.
- Leaders have not ensured that teachers are experts in early reading. This means that pupils are not taught well enough in order to become confident and fluent readers. Leaders should ensure that teachers know how to teach reading well.
- Leaders do not consistently monitor all aspects of staff's work sufficiently well. This means that they are not always aware of how some of the strategies they have introduced are working. Leaders should make sure that they develop effective processes to enable them to monitor the impact of the strategies they expect all staff to follow.

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	140531
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	10216276
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	421
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	38
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael Briscoe
Headteacher	Brian Thomas
Website	www.severndaleschool.org
Date of previous inspection	10 July 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the governance of the school. The school has joined a new academy trust and is now part of the Learning Community Trust.
- The school operates a nursery provision at the Monkmoor campus site. There is provision for two-year-olds. At the time of this inspection, there were no two-year-olds on roll.
- The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provider.
- The school's 16 to 25 provision for students with moderate learning difficulties is based at a local college. The school also operates a satellite provision at a local secondary school, which offers provision for pupils with moderate learning difficulties.
- All pupils in the school have an EHCP. The school caters for pupils with a broad range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. These include speech,

language and communication needs, physical disabilities, social and emotional difficulties and autism spectrum disorder.

- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This means that pupils in Years 8 to 13 receive information about the full range of education and training options open to them. This includes opportunities for a range of education and training providers to speak to pupils about technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 principal, the vice principals and other senior leaders. In addition, the lead inspector met with the chief executive office of the Learning Community Trust. Inspectors met with representatives of governance, including the chair of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and interaction, early reading, physical health and development and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with curriculum leaders and teachers, visited a sample of lessons, reviewed pupils' work and spoke with some pupils about their learning.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included: school policies, safeguarding records, curriculum plans, pupils' attendance and behaviour records.
- Through discussions with leaders, pupils and staff, inspectors considered how effectively pupils are safeguarded. An inspector also looked at documents related to safeguarding, including the school's single central record of checks on staff.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in a range of different classes and at different times of the day. They talked to pupils informally about bullying, behaviour and welfare.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments. They also spoke with parents before and after school. Inspectors looked at responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff and responses to Ofsted's pupils' survey.

Inspection team

Christopher Stevens, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Russell Hinton	Ofsted Inspector
Mary Maybank	Ofsted Inspector
Claire Price	Her Majesty's Inspector

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