

Inspection of an outstanding school: West Hill School

Kingston Road, Leatherhead, Surrey KT22 7PW

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 April 2022

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils flourish in this happy, calm and well-organised school. Strong levels of care, combined with high expectations, mean that pupils feel comfortable and secure. They welcome visitors warmly, sharing their achievements with understandable pride.

The school's values underpin school life. Pupils respect adults and each other. They work hard and develop valuable skills to help them in the classroom. For example, the youngest children learn how to take turns, while older pupils put their hands up to answer a question. Pupils demonstrate remarkable patience. This is because they know that everyone will be included. During the inspection, for instance, children in Reception Year waited patiently to choose an object during a phonics session, while pupils in another class listened intently as a classmate described the courage needed to climb steep steps during a visit to a circus.

Pupils behave sensibly and get on well together. They told inspectors that having time with their friends is one of their favourite things about school. Pupils enjoy playing and learning in the school's attractive grounds. During the inspection, pupils joined in enthusiastically with a game of hide-and-seek organised by their teacher in the school's orchard. Leaders take any concerns about the risk of bullying seriously and act promptly.

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

Pupils are at the heart of the curriculum. Their needs are central to leaders' decisions about what pupils learn and the order in which the curriculum's content is taught. The use of assessment to identify pupils' needs and to support learning is fundamental to the school's work. The school's assessment system, West Hill Steps, enables adults to monitor pupils' learning effectively and is securely in place from Reception Year to Year 6.

All pupils have an education, health and care plan when they join the school. Leaders put carefully targeted plans in place to support each pupil's needs. Staff work constructively with parents and carers and specialists, such as speech and language therapists.

All parents who responded to Ofsted's survey, and those who spoke with inspectors, say that their children receive the support needed to succeed. One said, 'As a parent of a child with special educational needs, I worry constantly about doing what is best for my child but attending West Hill has been the best thing that could have happened. I feel supported, included, and trust the staff implicitly,' while another said, 'I am grateful every day that my child attends this wonderful school.'

Leaders have revised the school's approach to teaching phonics during the past two years. The reading lead has worked tirelessly with her colleagues to develop an approach that is closely tailored to pupils' needs. She has categorised books to ensure that these reflect and support what pupils are learning in phonics, and she has delivered staff training to support teaching. Her hard work has paid off. There are early indications that this ambitious and well-sequenced programme is strengthening pupils' reading skills. However, the impact of the pandemic means that the programme is not fully embedded across the school. Leaders are now focused on making sure that this is the case.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons is exemplary. They listen carefully, follow instructions quickly, and settle to tasks without fuss. Occasionally, a pupil may become frustrated or anxious. Staff provide firm but gentle reminders about expectations when required. Their deep understanding of individual pupils' needs means that they are skilled in spotting and defusing problems at an early stage.

Prior to the pandemic, the school provided a wide range of appealing activities to enhance learning, such as history club, Harry Potter club and magic club. The pandemic has curtailed such activities in the past two years. Leaders are keen to get things back to normal. They are currently reinstating special events, such as the upcoming residential trip for pupils in Years 5 and 6, as the pandemic eases.

The principal provides highly effective leadership for the school. She leads by example, supported by a strong senior leadership team. One parent rightly commented, 'The school values come from the top – from the principal and vice-principal and across the whole school community.' Leaders take staff well-being seriously. They make sure that workloads are manageable, and that staff feel valued. Staff appreciate the steps taken by leaders to maintain team spirit during the pandemic. They are excited to be able to work alongside colleagues again as the pandemic eases.

Leaders, governors and trustees work very well together. They have developed clear roles and responsibilities and complement each other's strengths effectively.

In discussion with the principal, inspectors agreed that the extent to which the school's phonics programme is embedded throughout the school may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, governors and trustees give pupils' safety the highest priority. They maintain extremely robust safeguarding policies and procedures in the school and make sure that staff are suitably trained. Leaders are single-minded in their determination to secure the necessary help for pupils, including when liaising with agencies such as children's services. Staff are very confident about what to do if they are concerned about a pupil. They report any worries without delay because their training tells them, 'Don't over-think it – just do it'. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy DSLs are always available via the school's radio system.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders reviewed the school's phonics programme prior to the pandemic. They recognised the need to find an approach that was better suited to pupils' needs. Leaders' dissatisfaction with commercial phonics programmes at that time led to a bold decision. They decided to create a phonics programme that is bespoke to the school. The school now has a carefully designed and rigorous system for teaching phonics and a stock of graded books to support learning. Where this is followed closely and taught effectively, the impact is clear in pupils' responses, their enthusiasm and in their growing confidence in reading. However, the programme is not embedded fully in all classes. This means that some pupils are not learning as well as they could. Leaders recognise that more time is needed to ensure that the phonics programme is fully established and delivered consistently well.

Background

When we have judged a school outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, West Hill School, to be outstanding in April 2014.

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	144228
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10203152
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	135
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ian Wilson
Principal	Abigail Slade
Website	www.west-hill.surrey.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- West Hill School converted to become an academy school in October 2017. When its predecessor school, West Hill School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- West Hill was initially part of the Learning and Inspiration for Tomorrow (LIFT) partnership when it became an academy in October 2017. The LIFT partnership subsequently merged with The Howard Partnership Trust (THPT) in March 2021.
- The school has transitioned from a secondary school to a primary school during the past few years. The transition is now complete, with pupils in all year groups, from Reception Year to Year 6.
- Heightened precaution measures that had been put in place due to high COVID-19 rates in the school were removed shortly before the inspection.
- The principal was appointed in April 2019.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school had 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, vice-principal and assistant principal, as well as other members of staff. The lead inspector spoke with the chair of governors and the chair of trustees. She also met with the chief executive officer and deputy chief executive officer of the trust.
- Inspectors held telephone conversations with six parents. They also considered the views expressed by parents, staff and pupils in Ofsted's surveys.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, personal, social and health education, and music. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with a group of pupils, as well as talking with pupils informally in lessons, during the lunchtime break, and around the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of safeguarding records and documents, including the single central record. They also met with the DSL and reviewed the school's safeguarding records.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates:
<http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2022