

Inspection of The Wherry School

280 Hall Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR1 2GB

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 June 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Wherry pupils arrive often after significant disruption to their formal education. The positive relationships and caring culture, set alongside well-established routines, help them to settle in quickly and become ready to learn. Pupils' emotional health and well-being are very well supported, including through the on-site clinical team. They are taught how to regulate their own behaviour. Staff are skilful in spotting signs of anxiety which might lead to challenging situations, so they act quickly to defuse any tension. Any occasional disruption in lessons, or around the school, is carefully managed. Consequently, the atmosphere is typically calm and orderly.

Pupils learn how to get on with each other and respect individual differences. They say that bullying is rare and trust staff to support them if they are worried. Pupils become increasingly confident as they move through the year groups. Sixth-form students speak proudly about their achievements and future plans, including moving on to college courses and A-level studies. While most pupils make significant improvements in their attendance over time, some do not attend as regularly as they should.

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

Leaders have ensured that Wherry pupils have access to a wide-ranging and interesting curriculum. They are committed to supporting pupils and sixth-form students to be the best that they can be. The headteacher and governors are ambitious in equal measures for pupils' academic achievement and personal development. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is a prominent theme that is threaded through daily school life.

Pupils join the school at different stages, often after significant periods of disruption to their education. Staff take time to get to know them before they arrive. They plan carefully to address gaps in pupils' previous learning while helping them to improve their confidence and self-esteem. Older pupils are guided to relevant awards and qualifications to meet their individual needs and interests, including GCSEs. Where appropriate, sixth-form students receive support to access A-level studies with other local schools. Over time, pupils and students achieve well from their different starting points.

Leaders have thought about the content taught at different stages in each subject. Learning is generally well planned to build on what pupils already know. Teachers revisit important knowledge to help pupils apply it to new situations. While the quality of education is good overall, the precision of planning to meet pupils' needs is less developed in a few primary subjects, such as history and geography, than it is in the secondary phase. Leaders are making changes, including working with subject specialists, to improve the cohesiveness with which the curriculum flows across subjects from Year 1 to post-16.

Securing pupils' reading fluency and speech, language and communication skills is a

high priority. Ongoing training ensures that staff are equipped to use phonics to teach early reading. Effective support is offered to pupils who need to catch up. In lessons, teachers routinely emphasise important subject-specific language that pupils need to know to be successful.

Staff make regular checks on pupils' learning throughout their time in school. The three-tier system provides opportunities for individual and small group support. This helps pupils to build resilience, improve their communication skills and to become more confident to learn with others.

Beyond academic studies, the school's personal development and personal, social and health education programmes make a significant difference to pupils' self-esteem and aspirations. Careers education helps them to make the right choices at different stages. Sixth-form students understand the barriers that autism spectrum disorder can create, and they learn strategies to help manage them. Pupils are taught the importance of healthy relationships. Activities such as residential visits, paddleboarding, climbing, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and work experience, contribute well to ensuring pupils achieve their potential. Improving overall attendance, including minimising the number of pupils on temporary, reduced timetables, is an ongoing priority for school leaders.

Governors are a skilful and experienced team. They make sure they keep up with important training, so they are well placed in holding leaders to account for the school's performance. Securing the best for Wherry pupils is at the heart of all they do. Link governors provide an additional layer of support and challenge through on-site monitoring and review. Staff are proud of their school. They say they feel well supported and that leaders are mindful of their well-being. Almost all parents who shared their views with inspectors were positive about the school's work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors are mindful of their duty to keep pupils safe. Well-considered safeguarding and supervision systems are in place. All the required checks on new employees are completed. Staff are appropriately trained to spot any signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. Leaders follow up on safeguarding concerns quickly. The safeguarding team works closely with school-based specialists and external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils are well supported. The PSHE curriculum is carefully matched to important aspects of safeguarding. This means that pupils are taught how to stay safe in different situations, when online and at different age-related stages.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- While the quality of education is good overall, the implementation of curriculum

changes in a few aspects, including primary foundation subjects, is still evolving. In these subjects, leaders do not always know how effectively pupils are learning because the detail of curriculum content is not consistently well defined. This means that teachers do not have the precise information they need to fill any gaps in pupils' knowledge effectively over time. Leaders should ensure that they complete the final stages of their planned curriculum development quickly so that pupils achieve equally well in all subjects and the curriculum is cohesively planned across the primary and secondary phases.

- Although most pupils make great strides in improving their attendance from low starting points, some do not attend as regularly as they should. This means that they do not achieve consistently well when they are not in school. Leaders should continue to work closely with pupils, families and local authority services to minimise the time pupils spend away from school so that all pupils reach their potential by the time they leave.

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	144769
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10212044
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	109
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	10
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Barry Payne
Principal	Rachel Quick
Website	www.thewherryschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened in September 2017 as a single academy free school.
- Places are offered to pupils aged from five to 19 years, typically from the Norfolk and Suffolk local authority areas.
- The provision caters for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities related to autism spectrum disorder. Each pupil has an education, health and care plan.
- Most pupils have had significant periods of disruption to their formal education prior to joining the school.

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, the designated safeguarding leads, teachers and other school staff.
- The lead inspector met with a group of governors. She also spoke with the chair of governors, parents and a representative of Norfolk local authority in separate telephone conversations.
- Inspectors spoke informally with pupils around the school, as well as met with small groups of pupils to hear about their school experiences.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, reading, PSHE, history and mathematics. 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 policies.
- Inspectors considered 41 responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and 37 free-text comments from parents. Inspectors also took account of the school's own questionnaires for staff's and pupils' views.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Lucas

Her Majesty's Inspector

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