

Inspection of an outstanding school: Gibside School

Shipcote Lane, Gateshead NE8 4DE

Inspection dates:

8 and 9 June 2022

Outcome

Gibside School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at Gibside School. They enjoy coming to this friendly and inspirational school. Leaders have the highest expectations and an unrelenting ambition for the pupils in their care. Leaders have designed a curriculum that puts no ceiling on pupils' success. Pupils develop communication skills that help them to flourish. They are excited to share their achievements.

Leaders ensure that all pupils have a 'voice'. Pupils are taught a range of communication tools developed to meet their individual needs. As a result, pupils are able to express themselves and make choices, both at school and beyond. One parent's comment, representing the views of many, stated, 'The school is an amazing place. They make sure that our child is educated in a way they can cope with, considering their complex mental and physical needs.' Inspectors agree.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent. The school environment is calm and welcoming. Leaders have worked to establish clear routines. These help to minimise pupils' anxiety. For example, pupils sing the 'transition song' when moving around the corridors. Pupils who have difficulty managing their emotions are quickly helped by skilled staff.

Bullying is rare. Pupils know that adults will deal with any bullying or unkind behaviour. As a consequence, pupils feel safe at school.

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

Leaders have designed a highly effective and bespoke curriculum for each pupil. They give careful consideration to pupils' education, health and care plans (EHC plan). Leaders have planned the curriculum in small steps to develop independence and communication as well as subject knowledge. Teachers use pupils' EHC plan targets to expertly craft lessons.

Children start to learn communication methods as soon as they start the Nursery Year.

Staff use a range of strategies to help pupils communicate. For example, some children learn a picture-based communication system and other children begin to learn to read using phonics. Leaders have established a flexible curriculum that is adapted to meet individual pupils' needs. For example, staff include a popular visual signing system in reading lessons to support some pupils to correctly say sounds. As pupils develop their communication strategies, their learning gathers pace. As a result, some pupils quickly learn to read fluently and confidently. They use expression and emotion when reading. Pupils are keen to share books and read to adults.

Leaders ensure a safe and effective learning environment for all pupils. Morning and afternoon sessions start with circle time to greet and settle pupils. This helps them to be ready for learning. Activities in lessons are multi-sensory, which stimulates pupils' curiosity. For example, in mathematics, pupils were seen fully engaged in counting to five by singing songs and using numbers that glowed in vivid colours. Staff know their pupils well. They know when a pupil is ready for more challenge and when it is time to move on or change approach. Pupils are supported effectively and highly engaged in learning, which helps them to achieve well.

Leaders have developed a partnership with a local primary school. Some pupils attend lessons in this school to prepare them for the next stage of their education. These pupils experience activities such as team sports. For example, pupils from Gibside play football matches as part of the primary school's team at lunchtime. This has inspired some pupils to join a community football team outside of school.

Leaders have established effective systems to improve the attendance of some pupils. Leaders work with a range of health care professionals to this end. For example, pupils can access physiotherapy and medical care in school so that they do not need to take time out of school to attend appointments.

Leaders offer an impressive range of opportunities to develop pupils' social skills. This prepares them for experiences outside school. For example, there is a school council for pupils to debate questions about the school design and the range of extra-curricular activities available. This is accessible to all pupils through communication boards and smart technology. Pupils can take part in a wide range of activities such as boccia, yoga, gymnastics, cycling, fishing and horse-riding.

Governors and school leaders are conscious of the workload of staff. Staff feel supported and understood. They feel that their well-being is a priority for leaders. Governors have an accurate view of the effectiveness of the school. Leaders encourage staff to work with teachers in other settings to better understand pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture throughout the school. Staff are well trained. They know their pupils exceptionally well. They are vigilant for indications that pupils could be

at risk of harm, especially those that are unable to communicate easily. Staff report concerns as soon as they spot them. Leaders diligently follow up on any issues.

Safeguarding is woven into the curriculum. Governors and leaders review safeguarding arrangements. Leaders adapt staff's training and the pupils' curriculum to build prevention and awareness of current safeguarding issues. Pupils use real-life examples to learn about the risks they might face online and outside school.

Background

When we have judged a school to be 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 as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in October 2012.

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	131213
Local authority	Gateshead
Inspection number	10228095
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	180
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	David Mitchell
Headteacher	Angela Whistler
Website	www.gibsidesschool.org
Date of previous inspection	7 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils who attend the school have EHC plans. The school caters for pupils with an autism spectrum disorder and pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The headteacher held the interim post from September 2021 and took up the substantive headteacher post in June 2022.
- The school has provision for two-year-olds, but no children currently attend.
- Twenty pupils attend a satellite provision in a local primary school staffed and managed by Gibside School.
- The school opened on a new site in February 2021. The original sites were in Blaydon and Whickham.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and the assistant headteachers.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in reading, art and physical development. Inspectors met with curriculum leaders, looked at pupils' work and talked to pupils and teachers. Leaders were involved throughout the deep dive activities.
- Inspectors visited the satellite provision at the local primary school. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, looked at samples of pupils' work and visited a lesson.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read to a familiar adult and visited additional mathematics lessons in the early years.
- Inspectors talked with pupils about their school.
- Inspectors met with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the local governing body, including the chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors reviewed the responses that were received through the online questionnaire Ofsted Parent View, which included free-text comments. Inspectors considered the responses that were received through Ofsted's staff questionnaire. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour throughout the school day, including pupils leaving school, during lesson visits and at lunchtimes.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents relating to safeguarding, including records of employment checks and safeguarding incidents. Inspectors met with the safeguarding leaders.

Inspection team

Christine Durand, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Pauline Rowland

Ofsted Inspector

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