

Inspection of a good school: Welcombe Hills School

Blue Cap Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire CV37 6TQ

Inspection dates:

14 and 15 September 2022

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's motto is 'Working together to do our best'. Every day, pupils work really hard to rise to this challenge. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They feel safe and they trust the staff to look after them. Prioritising pupils' well-being and carefully tailored pastoral care are the hallmarks of this school.

Leaders and staff know pupils well. They know when to step in and provide support if they sense that a pupil is becoming anxious or frustrated. Staff do all they can to support pupils to re-engage in their learning. Consequently, pupils behave well and display positive attitudes towards their learning. On the playground, pupils play well together or enjoy relaxing in their own company.

Bullying does not happen very often. Pupils are closely supervised, so any fall-outs between individuals are quickly sorted. Pupils and parents and carers appreciate this.

Leaders have high expectations of all pupils and pupils rise to this challenge. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. In particular, they value the level of personalised care and support that their children receive.

Leaders have introduced positive changes across the school to improve the quality of education. However, more work needs to be undertaken to improve parts of the curriculum and the teaching of phonics. This will enable pupils to achieve even better.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum that develops pupils' communication and language skills across the school effectively. Pupils with complex needs experience a range of learning opportunities that support them to communicate their needs and emotions well

in a variety of ways. Younger children and pupils follow an early years curriculum. This provides them with secure foundations to access the national curriculum when they are ready to do so.

In some subjects, such as mathematics and physical education, leaders have thought carefully about the structure and content of the curriculum. In these subjects, the curriculum maps out the knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn over time. Teachers value this guidance because it tells them what pupils have learned in the past, what they now need to teach, and what pupils will be learning in the future. As a result, in these subjects, pupils achieve well. However, in some subjects, such as science and geography, this is not the case. In these subjects, the curriculum is not well ordered. Consequently, lessons do not always build on what pupils have learned before. In these subjects, pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Leaders know that reading is essential to unlock pupils' learning in other subjects. Phonics teaching begins in early years and continues to the end of Year 6. Secondary-aged pupils at the early stages of reading continue to receive support to improve their reading. In the summer term of 2022, leaders introduced a new phonics programme. However, staff have not received training in relation to this. This is having a negative impact on the delivery of the phonics curriculum. As a result, pupils at the early stages of reading do not achieve as well as they should.

Teachers and teaching assistants know pupils well. They adapt their teaching to meet the learning needs of individual pupils. Where teachers have secure subject knowledge, they explain new learning clearly in a logical, structured manner. Teachers select appropriate resources to support pupils' learning. Staff regularly check pupils' understanding in lessons and adapt their teaching, or revisit learning, when required. There is a strong working partnership between teachers and teaching assistants.

Pupils value friendship and being with their classmates. Leaders organise a range of events to enrich the curriculum. Some of these were creatively adapted due to COVID-19 restrictions, such as an online school version of 'The Masked Singer'. Older pupils understand that a balanced diet and regular exercise help them to stay healthy. They know that talking about issues helps them to 'unbottle' their emotions when they feel anxious or worried. Older pupils speak knowledgeably about healthy relationships, including the topics of consent and contraception.

For post-16 students, independent living and preparing for the world of work are paramount. Students study towards a range of accreditations, including functional skills in English and mathematics. Students and their families appreciate the sense of achievement that these qualifications afford to the students. Leaders have introduced an intensive employability programme for students who attend the post-16 hub. The programme builds on what students have learned previously in careers lessons. Leaders have put in place an effective transition process to support students when they leave the school. Nearly all students move on to a placement at a further education college.

School leaders, supported by the multi-academy trust (MAT) and the academy advisory committee, are continuing to improve the school. Leaders have the full backing of staff.

Staff value the range of training they have received. Staff say that the training helps them to do their jobs better.

Staff work together and support each other. Staff commented that leaders have an open-door policy and trust them to do their jobs. Teachers said that workload is manageable. Staff commented that leaders are considerate of their well-being. Staff feel valued and morale is high.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is everyone's business at this school. Leaders and staff are well trained and understand the increased vulnerability of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff know how to identify when a pupil might be at risk of harm. They know exactly what to do if they have a concern about a pupil's welfare. Where necessary, the safeguarding team works with external agencies to put the right support in place for pupils and their families. The curriculum helps pupils to learn how to stay safe in school and in the wider world. This includes learning how to stay safe when working online. Leaders carry out the correct employment checks on staff.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, including science and geography, the curriculum is not clearly set out. In these subjects, lessons do not build on what pupils have learned previously. As a result, pupils' knowledge and skills do not build well over time. Leaders need to map out the knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn in these subjects across the school.
- There is too much variability in the delivery of the phonics curriculum for children and pupils at the early stages of reading. As a result, pupils fall behind with their reading and require extra help. Leaders need to provide staff with the relevant training and support so they can deliver the phonics curriculum effectively.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Welcombe Hills School, to be good in December 2017.

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.

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	145486
Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	10241488
Type of school	All-through special
School category	Academy special converter
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	179
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	43
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Eithne Lee
Headteacher	Angela Fox
Website	www.welcombe-hills.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Welcombe Hills School is an all-through special school.
- The school caters for pupils with a range of learning needs, including pupils with severe learning difficulties and complex needs. Pupils' prime areas of need are cognition and learning, communication and interaction, and sensory and/or physical.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Welcombe Hills School converted to become an academy in May 2018. When its predecessor school, Welcombe Hills School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school joined Unity MAT in September 2021.
- The school has provision for two-year-olds.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision.

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.
- The lead inspector met with the headteacher and the chief executive officer. He met with two members of the trust board, including the chair, and three members of the academy advisory committee, including the chair.
- Inspectors held meetings with a range of leaders to discuss safeguarding, provision for pupils with SEND, behaviour, careers and personal development.
- As part of the inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, communication and language, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to children, pupils and students about their learning, and looked at samples of work. The lead inspector also met with the art and design, science, and geography subject leaders.
- An inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils and students formally and informally about their learning and experiences at school. A group of students accompanied the lead inspector on a learning walk around the post-16 hub.
- Safeguarding documents were checked, including the checks that leaders make on staff's suitability to work with children. The inspectors checked that staff implement safeguarding policies and procedures effectively across the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, and the free-text comments received during the inspection.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's self-evaluation, school improvement priorities, school policies, curriculum documents, SEND records, behaviour records and minutes of meetings held by the board of trustees and the academy advisory committee.

Inspection team

Wayne Simner, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gwen Onyon

Ofsted Inspector

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