

Inspection of a good school: Brimble Hill Special School

Tadpole Lane, Redhouse, Swindon, Wiltshire SN25 2NB

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 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. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Members of the new leadership team at Brimble Hill Special School understand the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have correctly identified that the curriculum needs to be more carefully organised. They have also identified that staff do not have the guidance or training they need to make sure that pupils learn an agreed curriculum. Robust plans are in place to make the improvements needed. School leaders have the confidence of the trust and of the staff team to ensure that changes are made in a timely and effective way.

The strong relationships between staff and pupils are a strength of the school. Staff work hard to help pupils understand routines and expectations. They create a safe and happy place in which to learn. Over time, staff successfully support pupils to manage their challenges. There is a strong emphasis on values, such as being kind and helping one another. Should any bullying occur, staff notice and respond before it escalates. Consequently, pupils enjoy school. Many join in with all sorts of activities, such as the residential breaks, singing in the choir and playing outside during breaks.

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

Leaders, including those in the trust, are ambitious for pupils. They aim to ensure that the curriculum supports pupils to become as independent as possible. Leaders are honest and accurate in their evaluation of the school. They are aware that a key priority is to improve the curriculum, as it currently lacks detail and structure. The important knowledge for each subject is not clearly identified. Consequently, teachers have little guidance about what needs to be taught and when. Too much is left to chance. Leaders cannot assure themselves that pupils gain the knowledge they need to be ready for their next stages.

Staff development is not planned well enough to ensure that staff have the training they need to deliver the curriculum well. For example, there is a new approach to teaching phonics, but staff have not received the training about how to teach it. In addition, staff have had little opportunity to share strong examples of how best to deliver the curriculum or how to support pupils' individual needs.

Expectations for how staff should implement the curriculum are not clear. There are inconsistencies in how well pupils learn the curriculum across the school. This lack of clarity includes how pupils are supported in the early stages of learning to read. Children in the early years classes on the two school sites experience different approaches to the teaching of phonics. This makes transition to the main site for children more difficult. Leaders are aware of this. They plan to ensure closer partnership working between the two sites, but it is too early to see the impact of this.

Curriculum leaders have only recently been required to review their subjects and to lead improvements. These leaders have already accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses in their subjects. Appropriate plans are in place to make the improvements needed. However, this work is recent. There has not been enough time to make a difference to how well pupils learn an agreed curriculum.

A new assessment system supports staff to identify what knowledge pupils have stored in their long-term memory. It also identifies the gaps in knowledge that pupils still have. However, assessment information is not communicated between staff well enough. This leads to assessments sometimes being repeated unnecessarily to establish what pupils know and can do.

Leaders are currently reviewing how well the agreed outcomes in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans are achieved. Individual education plans identify the small next steps that will support pupils to gain the knowledge and skills they need. Leaders have accurately identified that these plans are inconsistent in quality. Too many do not outline what pupils and the adults supporting them need to focus on next. Expectations about how to support pupils to achieve their targets are not clear. Therefore, there are inconsistent approaches across the school. In addition, parents and carers are not supported well enough to be involved in discussing their child's progress.

School leaders, supported by the trust, are determined to make the improvements needed. There is a detailed action plan in place which accurately identifies the key priorities. Leaders have the backing of staff. All who responded to a survey agreed that the school is well led and managed. Staff speak positively of how well leaders support them to do their jobs. They feel trusted and valued.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders are knowledgeable and vigilant. They ensure that staff understand how to identify pupils who may be at risk and need help. Leaders respond to concerns about pupils' safety in a timely way. They refer to

appropriate safeguarding partners to ensure that pupils get the help they need. Recruitment processes are secure.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum lacks structure, sequencing and detail. Teachers do not have sufficient guidance to ensure that pupils learn what they need to achieve the school's aims. Leaders must put a well-organised curriculum in place that describes the important knowledge that pupils need to learn and when they need to learn it.
- Assessment information is not shared well enough between staff. Assessments are sometimes repeated. This takes up valuable learning time for pupils. Leaders need to ensure that assessment information for each pupil is communicated in an efficient way.
- There is an inconsistent pedagogy across the school for the teaching of phonics. Therefore, some pupils make better progress than others in learning to read. Leaders need to ensure that there are clear expectations and guidance for staff about the school's approaches to the teaching of phonics and early reading.
- Parents are not included well enough in the process of reviewing pupils' individual education plans. This weakens the effectiveness of the plans. Leaders need to create stronger partnerships with parents when reviewing pupils' education plans.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, also called Brimble Hill Special School, to be good in November 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.

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	143013
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	10241600
Type of school	Special
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	114
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	William Wyldbore-Smith
Headteacher	Lucy Golder
Website	www.brimblehillschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Brimble Hill Special School is a school for pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- Brimble Hall Special School converted to become an academy school in September 2018. When its predecessor school, also called Brimble Hill Special School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- When the school became an academy, it joined Brunel Academies Trust.
- The school uses no alternative provision.
- The school can cater for two-year-olds but at the time of this inspection, there were no two-year-olds on the school roll.
- In September 2022, an additional school site opened at Headland Grove in Swindon, a short distance from the main school. There are currently 12 pupils at this site who are taught by a staff team, supported by the trust. These pupils are in Reception and Year 1. They are waiting for appropriate places at the main school site but in the meantime, pupils receive a full education at the additional site.

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, assistant headteacher and other leaders at the school. A number of school documents were scrutinised, including the school's improvement plan. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone to a governor from the governing body. She also met with three trustees, including the chair of the trustees and the chief executive officer of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, physical development and expressive arts. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with curriculum leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors spoke to some pupils about their learning.
- An inspector met with a senior leader to discuss the school's approaches to individual education plans.
- Inspectors observed pupils moving around the school between lessons and outside during lunch break.
- Inspectors took the views provided through Ofsted's Parent View and a staff survey into account.
- An inspector visited the additional site and met with trust leaders there.
- To inspect safeguarding, an inspector met with the designated safeguarding team and scrutinised a variety of documents related to safeguarding, including the single central record. Inspectors spoke with staff and trustees about their training and understanding of safeguarding procedures.

Inspection team

Tonwen Empson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Hilary Goddard

Ofsted Inspector

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