

Inspection of an outstanding school: Victoria School

Bell Hill, Northfield, Birmingham, West Midlands B31 1LD

Inspection dates:

2 and 3 November 2022

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding 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?

This is a time of change at Victoria School. 'Working together for success' is more than the school motto. It is an expectation for all the whole school community. Leaders are ambitious that special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) will not hold pupils back, and staff are determined that not a moment is wasted.

An ambitious new curriculum is in place for all subjects, and leaders are confident that, in time, this will get the best outcomes for all pupils. However, leaders know that there is work to be done to ensure the curriculum is taught well across all classes.

Pupils have many different needs, such as communication, learning, sensory or physical. While these needs are well understood by staff, the provision to meet those needs is not always in place.

At Victoria, there is a very calm and purposeful environment. Behaviour across the school is positive. Most pupils feel that bullying hardly ever happens, while others rightly say that if it did, staff would act to help them.

Preparing pupils for life beyond Victoria is a priority. Lessons about being healthy, keeping safe and opportunities to develop independence start in the early years. Educational visits to places like Birmingham University or colleges enrich the taught curriculum.

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

When children start at Victoria, staff work with families to ensure the right provision is in place from day one. Leaders meet with pre-school services, nurseries and families to make sure that staff have the right knowledge about how the child learns. A well-planned

early years environment promotes opportunities to develop early communication and thinking skills.

Teachers work well with services, such as sensory processing specialists and physiotherapists, to plan provision to overcome barriers to learning. For example, sensory profiles and postural management plans set clear expectations for pupils' needs. Provision in the multi-sensory impairment (MSI) unit is particularly effective in responding to and meeting individual needs.

Most pupils access systems to help them communicate. Leaders' vision is that all will be confident communicators and use these skills to get the most from all lessons. All staff receive regular training. Specialist staff work with class teams to ensure that appropriate systems are in place for the pupils. Systems such as Eye Gaze, E-Tran frames, or objects of reference give many pupils, who do not use spoken words, the ability to communicate.

For most pupils, these plans to meet individual SEND are well implemented in class and around the school. However, some staff do not consistently implement the expected provision. For example, sometimes too many words are used by staff, or postural management plans are implemented without telling pupils why they are being moved. This limits pupils' engagement in their own learning.

Over the last year, leaders have carried out a complete review of the school curriculum. Ambition is high in all subjects. For many pupils, they are thriving on these high expectations. Learning is building on what they can remember and can do from previous lessons. However, sometimes teaching does not take into account how much pupils have understood and learned previously. This means that learning new knowledge is too complicated and can confuse pupils.

Expectations are equally high across all subjects. New plans for what should be taught and when are precise, so that they aim to build pupils' knowledge over time. However, while systems for assessing pupils' progress are clear in subjects such as reading and mathematics, other subjects have not yet implemented systems to precisely evaluate what pupils have learned in different lessons.

At Victoria, the aim is that all pupils will become confident readers. This ambition is the same regardless of starting points, communication style or individual needs. A new reading scheme and continuing training are increasing expertise among all staff. Teachers regularly read books or sensory stories to pupils to inspire pupils' love of reading. Additional teaching ensures that confident readers develop a more challenging knowledge of different texts and books.

Pupils experience a range of opportunities while at Victoria. Lessons in personal, social, health, and economic (PSHE) education develop awareness of keeping safe and positive relationships. When needed, pupils access emotional support from staff and counselling services. Travel training, financial management and employability courses prepare students for independence in life. The school council and the students' leadership team provide opportunities to develop responsibility and contribute positively. Boccia, table

cricket and archery are just some ways in which pupils develop an awareness of being healthy and active.

A small number of the oldest students told inspectors that in the past, expectations of them have been too low. However, over the last few years, they can see positive changes. Staff work hard with colleges and employment services to prepare students for ambitious next steps. Recently, there has been an increasing number of students going into supported internships.

Staff are optimistic about the changes at the school. They rightly feel that the school is well led and managed. There is an excitement around the new curriculum. Confidence to try new things and be creative are welcomed by leaders. Staff embrace the challenge to be ambitious for every pupil.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

When he was appointed, the executive headteacher identified some changes he needed to make to safeguarding procedures in the school. Governors agreed with these changes. Consequently, keeping children safe remains the top priority for all staff. Training is regular. The staff know the systems well and report concerns quickly when they arise. The safeguarding team acts swiftly to ensure these concerns are addressed.

When needed, the family team support parents and pupils to reduce the risk of potential harm. Pupils take part in lessons focused on their ability to keep themselves safe online or in the real world.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The planned provision to meet pupils' individual sensory, behaviour, communication and physical needs is not always consistently implemented in all classes. This means that there are occasions when some pupils cannot get the most from the lessons because they cannot communicate or regulate their emotions or sensory needs. Leaders should ensure that all staff consistently implement the precisely identified and planned provision for each pupil.
- In some subjects, assessment systems are not planned to assess what pupils should have learned in that subject. Consequently, teachers' assessments are too generalised and not focused enough on what the pupils need to know to prepare for the next steps, which adversely affects pupils' learning. Leaders should ensure that assessment is used effectively in all subjects to enable teachers to find out what pupils know and remember, and use this information well to plan and teach.

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 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 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.

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	103601
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10228263
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
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	228
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	43
Appropriate authority	The federated governing body
Chair of federated governing body	Clare Mills
Executive headteacher	Gary Coffey
Website	http://www.victoria.bham.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	29 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of a federation with Cherry Oak School and Victoria College. Victoria School and Cherry Oak School share one federated governing body. Victoria College has a separate Board of Trustees.
- The school has enhanced provision on site for 13 pupils with multi-sensory impairment.
- A new executive headteacher took up the post in September 2021 and was joined by a new head of school in September 2022. An existing staff member took up an assistant headteacher, in October 2022, to lead the Secondary department (including 14-19 provision).
- A new chair of governors took up post in October 2018.
- Programmes of study for older pupils meet the requirements of the Baker Clause. This means pupils in Years 8 to 13 receive information about the full range of education and training options. This includes opportunities for various education and training providers to speak to pupils about technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the provider received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the provider and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the provider.

- During the inspection, inspectors completed deep dives in the following subjects: communication, reading, mathematics, physical development and postural management and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. In these subjects, they visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, and talked with pupils and staff about how these subjects were taught. Inspectors also looked at other subjects in less detail to check how they were planned and taught.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders responsible for early years and the sixth form to review how children and families are supported when they start school and how students are supported to be ready for further employment training or education after the sixth form.
- Inspectors asked pupils, staff, leaders and governors about safeguarding arrangements. They scrutinised the record of employment checks on school staff and looked at other school records. They also found out about safety procedures and routines.
- Inspectors observed informal times to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- During the inspection, the inspectors had formal meetings with the Executive Headteacher, Head of School, senior leaders, governors, teachers, and pupils. Inspectors spoke to a representative from the local authority. They also talked informally with parents, carers, escorts, drivers, pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.

Inspection team

Chris Pollitt, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Heather Davies

Ofsted Inspector

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