

Inspection of a good school: Benton Dene School

Hailsham Avenue, Longbenton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyne and Wear NE12 8FD

Inspection dates:

2 and 3 November 2022

Outcome

Benton Dene School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school of kindness, of care, and of wanting success. There are no limits as to what staff believe their pupils can achieve. This is a school where the pupils come first, and where decisions are taken in their best interests. Staff take the time, and the care, to get to know the pupils they will be working with very well.

Leaders are ambitious for every pupil. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and learning. Pupils respond keenly to teachers. Their behaviour and attitudes to learning are splendid. The values of 'recognising that a safe, stimulating, happy environment will support learning' are well established.

Parents, carers and pupils value this school. Some pupils say that they like 'being nice to each other, helping each other, being patient'. Pupils say there is very little bullying or unkind name-calling. When disagreements happen, pupils say that teachers sort them out quickly. As a result, pupils feel safe.

Pupils can take part in many sporting and creative activities. They enjoy the wide range of clubs, such as basketball, gymnastics and football. Leaders plan opportunities for pupils to take on projects that help them to develop as active citizens. Their recent visit to 'The Common Room' in Newcastle to present their ideas on climate change has been successful. Judges have praised their idea of a mechanical boat powered by solar panels, that can collect plastic from the ocean. As a result of their amazing efforts, Benton Dene's is the winning entry of North Tyneside Learning Trust's Climate Strategy.

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

Staff and governors value the expertise of senior leaders. Governors engage well with leaders on how they are improving the school. New teachers are benefiting from a broad range of expertise across the school. Leaders have put in place a more ambitious curriculum for all pupils. This is effective and leading to further improvements.

Developing pupils' ability to communicate is at the core of the curriculum. All members of staff are trained to communicate with pupils in different ways. Teachers use communication programmes, such as Makaton, to help pupils to express their feelings and to make choices. Staff's knowledge of communication is strong. In classes, pupils who were previously not speaking often begin to communicate verbally, supported by staff and other prompts.

Teachers know that their pupils make small steps in their learning. They use their expertise well in helping pupils build their knowledge. Staff know pupils need to repeat tasks again and again before their understanding develops. Teachers make sure that the important things are covered so that they can learn more.

Despite the challenges that COVID-19 has presented, the pace of change remains rapid. Leaders have mapped out the important knowledge that pupils need to learn over time. Leaders have trained staff in how to teach the curriculum effectively. All staff speak highly of the way leaders have managed this period of change while having regard for the workload pressures on them.

Reading has a high priority. Leaders have ensured that there are high-quality books that pupils are attracted to read. Pupils with complex needs focus on what a book is for and what a story is. Staff receive regular training to help them to deliver effective reading lessons. As a result, children in the early years and key stage 1 get off to a good start in learning to read. Teachers make sure that they develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of sounds and letters well. Staff give pupils who can read lots of practice.

The mathematics curriculum builds on what pupils have previously learned. Teachers introduce children to mathematical language straightaway. Regular practice and time to recap previous knowledge help pupils to remember what they have learned in the past. This helps pupils to build on their mathematical skills. Teachers use a range of resources to clearly illustrate mathematical concepts. This helps pupils to quickly grasp new learning.

All staff are highly committed to the school's programme for pupils' personal development. Communication from school to families is first rate. Leaders have recently introduced a new personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. There is a lot of exciting learning taking place. However, the use of assessment is less developed. This means that staff are not capturing how pupils build their knowledge and life skills to inform their progress and preparation for adulthood.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff receive training that enables them to identify any pupils who may need help. Leaders take suitable action when this is the case. Pupils feel confident about telling a trusted adult in school about any concerns that they may have.

Safeguarding leaders work effectively with external agencies to provide support for children and families to protect those at risk of harm. Leaders ensure that appropriate checks are undertaken of adults who work in the school.

Pupils learn about safety in the curriculum, including the risks associated with roads and personal safety, as well as the dangers of using the internet.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Teachers do not check what pupils know in the new PSHE curriculum accurately enough. This makes it difficult to build securely on pupils' prior learning. Leaders should ensure that staff are trained to successfully check what pupils have learned in PSHE and then provide support based on this assessment. This will enable pupils to build their knowledge and skills over time as preparation for adulthood.

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 school to be good in March 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

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| Unique reference number | 108655 |
| Local authority | North Tyneside |
| Inspection number | 10228347 |
| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Maintained |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 120 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Marianne Allan |
| Headteacher | Alison McAllister Williams |
| Website | www.bentondeneschools.org.uk |
| Dates of previous inspection | 28 and 29 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- This is a primary special school for pupils with autism spectrum disorder and learning difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.
- There are currently no nursery-age children.
- The school is part of the North Tyneside Learning Trust.

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, the deputy headteacher, middle leaders, teachers, pastoral staff and some non-teaching staff.
- Inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: reading and communication, mathematics and PSHE. They talked to leaders and teachers about their curriculum plans. They

spoke to some pupils about their learning. They looked at pupils' work and their personal plans.

- The lead inspector met three members of the governing body.
- Inspectors examined a range of school documentation, including leaders' self-evaluation, improvement plans and documentation relating to attendance and behaviour.
- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leads. Inspectors considered the safeguarding policy, training records and examples of safeguarding concerns.
- Inspectors took into account responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, and responses to the survey for staff. Inspectors spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector spoke to a representative from North Tyneside local authority.

Inspection team

Ann Muxworthy, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Paul Barton

Ofsted Inspector

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