

Inspection of an outstanding school: Uplands School

The Learning Campus, Tadpole Lane, Swindon, Wiltshire SN25 2NB

Inspection dates:

29 and 30 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?

Uplands is a school where each pupil is valued and celebrated for who they are and what they can do. Staff create safe spaces for pupils to learn. Individual adaptations ensure that no matter what the challenges are, everyone makes the most of what they have. Consequently, pupils enjoy school and are proud to attend. They are confident that staff will help them with any problems they encounter. As one pupil described the school, 'It's a nice, friendly place.'

The curriculum is relevant. It aims to support pupils towards being as independent as possible. Pupils revisit important themes such as building positive, healthy relationships. They learn everyday skills such as cooking their meals. As a parent or carer expressed, 'The life skills he learns are vital for him to be a productive member of society.' A key to the success of the school is how well staff understand the needs of every pupil. Staff discover how best to communicate so that each pupil can learn.

Leaders recognise these strengths but are not at all complacent. They have rightly identified some areas to improve. For example, they have introduced new approaches to how pupils learn phonics and enjoy reading.

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

Leaders, including those from the multi-academy trust, are ambitious for all pupils who attend Uplands School. They are determined that pupils are 'engaged, enabled and challenged'. Leaders ensure that the curriculum reflects this aim so that pupils can learn the life skills they need. Trust leaders have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas to improve and have put in place extra support for the new leadership team.

Staff manage pupils' transitions into school each day well. They greet pupils with smiles

and a warm welcome. Reliable routines help pupils to settle down to their learning. At times, there are interruptions to the calm learning environment. When pupils become unsettled, staff work together to ensure that pupils have the extra help they need to return to learning as soon as they can.

Leaders carefully consider pupils' personal development. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum is rightly prioritised. Enthusiastic school council members work together to represent pupils across the school. Staff present complex themes, such as democracy and the role of parliament, in a clear way. Sixth-form students benefit from extra responsibilities, for example organising the library and taking part in lunchtime clubs such as the school choir. The transition to college is managed well. Students look forward to 'becoming more independent' and 'learning new skills, like using an oven', when they move to college.

Leaders' recent review of the sequence and design of the curriculum has meant significant changes in how teachers plan and organise learning. Following training for staff, an appropriate phonics scheme is in place. There are new reading resources in use across the school. However, it is too early to see the impact of these changes on pupils' learning.

Staff use a variety of approaches to support pupils to learn to read. Teaching assistants support individual reading. For example, a pupil explored meanings in a dictionary when reading information about the monarchy. As a result of guidance and discussion, he learned about 'duty' and 'responsibility'. However, there are inconsistent expectations for the frequency and quality of reading experiences that pupils receive across the school.

The use of assessment to personalise learning is a strength of the school. Staff understand pupils' learning needs very well. They identify each individual pupil's next steps to help them achieve their education, health and care plan (EHC plan) outcomes.

Changes to the curriculum have brought greater clarity in some learning pathways and some subjects. This supports staff to make appropriate curriculum choices to suit each pupil's learning needs. However, the curriculum is not implemented consistently well across the school. Also, in the core subjects of English and mathematics, it is not clear what pupils must know and be able to do. Therefore, in some subjects and in some pathways, pupils do not learn as much as they could.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know how to identify and report any concerns they may have about a pupil. Pupils' safety and well-being is their first priority. Staff teams work closely together, and with parents, to provide the right support to pupils. Leaders report concerns in a timely way.

Through the school's PSHE curriculum, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and about managing healthy relationships.

Governors and leaders from the trust understand their safeguarding responsibilities and provide appropriate oversight. Recruitment checks on staff are thorough.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There are inconsistencies in how well the curriculum is implemented for different subjects and learning pathways. Therefore, some pupils do not learn as much as they could. Leaders must ensure that the agreed curriculum is implemented effectively across the school.
- Expectations for the teaching of phonics and reading have risen, but these are not embedded. Some pupils do not have the support they need to learn to read and to enjoy reading. Leaders must ensure that the curriculum for reading, including phonics, supports all pupils well.

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 predecessor school, Uplands School, to be outstanding in July 2014.

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	143014
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	10241599
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	155
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	53
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	William Wyldbore-Smith
Headteacher	David Stevens
Website	www.uplandsschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Uplands School is a special school located within a learning campus in Swindon. A few sixth-form students are located at the school's second site, which is within Horizons College in Royal Wootton Bassett.
- Uplands is a school for pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- Uplands School converted to become an academy school and joined Brunel Academies Trust in September 2018. When its predecessor school, also called Uplands School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- A new headteacher was appointed in 2021.
- The school uses one alternative provider. This is an unregistered provider.

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 held meetings with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team. An inspector met with the chief executive officer and the deputy director of education of the trust and the vice-chair of trustees. There was also a meeting with four governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, PSHE and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and, as appropriate, looked at samples of pupil's work and spoke to pupils about their learning.
- An inspector met with a group of students in the sixth form to hear their views about the school.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead, spoke to staff, spoke to pupils and reviewed safeguarding documents such as the single central record.
- An inspector visited Horizons College.
- The responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and to a staff survey were taken into account.

Inspection team

Tonwen Empson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Hilary Goddard

Ofsted Inspector

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