

Inspection of Churchward School

William Morris Way, Swindon, Wiltshire SN25 2PP

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 January 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy the calm, happy school environments at both sites that make up Churchward School. Leaders in the trust, school leaders and governors have not been thwarted by a recent unsettled period involving staffing changes. They are resolute in their drive to create a good school.

The ambitious curriculum ensures that learning is relevant, fun and interesting. Teachers and teaching assistants manage pupils' communication challenges and sensory needs very well. They adapt learning tasks and the environment to match pupils' individual needs. This enables pupils to learn in the way that suits them.

As a result of the nurture provided by staff, pupils settle to their activities and stick at them. For example, during a music lesson, pupils remembered drumming techniques from previous lessons. They used these to perform to a high standard.

Pupils are confident that staff sort out any friendship or bullying issues they may have. If pupils ever need a little extra help, they turn to the five trusted adults and friends named on their 'safe hands'. Pupils learn to appreciate one another's challenges. They show empathy when describing how well staff support pupils during 'crisis' moments. As a pupil explained, 'Here, you can learn to be you.'

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

Leaders are unfaltering in their ambition for pupils. They have designed a curriculum that aims to prepare pupils for their futures by developing pupils' independence. They ensure that pupils study for, and gain, appropriate recognised qualifications whenever this is possible.

Staff implement and adapt the curriculum well. Pupils practise and embed new learning by applying knowledge to real-life situations. For example, pupils show a strong understanding of food hygiene. They routinely follow basic hygiene rules, such as washing hands and putting on aprons.

The reading culture is strong. Reading is prioritised across all subjects in the curriculum. Staff encourage pupils to read, and do all they can to develop pupils' love of reading. High-quality reading resources are all around the school, including in the library. For the few pupils who are at the earliest stages of learning to read, leaders recognise that more needs to be done. Some pupils do not read as fluently as they could.

The personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) curriculum is broad and relevant for pupils at the school. The content supports pupils' understanding of how to live healthy, happy and secure lives. In this subject, as in others, knowledge is purposefully revisited. This helps strengthen pupils' understanding of important content. Themes are in a logical order so that new content builds on what has gone before. Leaders support staff well to ensure that the curriculum is delivered in a

coherent and accessible way. As a result, pupils experience consistent approaches which help them to learn effectively. There is emphasis, for example, on relating content to 'prior, now and next'. Regular assessments throughout the school year help leaders to check how well pupils learn the curriculum. The systems to check how well pupils remember key knowledge over longer periods of time are less rigorous.

Staff develop pupils' appreciation of values throughout the curriculum. Staff and pupils refer to the visual prompts and reminders displayed around the school. Pupils are rightly proud of their school, and talk positively about it. They try their best during lessons. There are high levels of respect between staff and pupils.

Well-organised academic and pastoral interventions support pupils to become confident young learners. Pupils' timetables are flexible and specifically developed to meet individual needs and interests. Pupils speak highly of how well staff help them to learn. They say that everyone is valued and included. Even so, some express that they would appreciate being given more responsibilities to help other pupils.

Pupils in the sixth form feel excited about their futures. Leaders prioritise individual, well-planned and relevant career pathways. As a result, all pupils transition to further education, employment or training. Staff support one another and say that teamwork is strong. They appreciate the well-planned professional development that leaders provide. Morale is high. There is a palpable buzz and energy around ensuring that everyone at Churchward School achieves the school's vision, 'Recognising strengths, gaining skills and achieving success'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils say they feel safe at school, and they are safe. Trustees, governors, school leaders and staff contribute well to the strong culture of safeguarding that exists. Recruitment processes are thorough and secure.

Leaders are knowledgeable and meticulous when ensuring that safeguarding systems are effective. They keep staff up to date with the latest safeguarding procedures and practices. As a result, staff are confident about how to notice and report any concerns. Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The few pupils at the school who are at the early stages of learning to read do not catch up as well as they could. Leaders recognise this but it is too soon to see the impact of the actions they have put in place. Leaders must ensure that staff have the knowledge and resources they need to provide appropriate support in phonics.
- Assessment systems in the school help leaders to check that pupils learn key content in subjects across the curriculum. However, systems to check that pupils remember what they have learned are less developed. Leaders need to check and assure themselves that pupils remember important curriculum content over time.

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	145874
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	10256593
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
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	91
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	21
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	William Wyldbore-Smith
Headteacher	David Dearsley
Website	churchwardschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Churchward School opened as a free school in September 2018. It is part of Brunel Academies Trust.
- The school is a special school, providing places for pupils from across Swindon and other neighbouring areas. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities related to autism and associated social and communication difficulties. Some pupils also have more complex issues, including trauma and anxiety. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school operates on two sites. Most pupils attend the main school site, which is a new building to the north of Swindon. Around 17 pupils attend the Bridges site at Lydiard Millicent. Pupils attending Bridges access specialist provision which aims to provide a pathway back into education.
- The school uses two unregistered providers, who provide additional mentoring services.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 had several meetings with the headteacher and other senior leaders. There were also meetings with the chief executive officer of the trust and the trust's assistant education director. An inspector met with three governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, PSHCE and food technology. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- An inspector met with members of the pupil school council to discuss aspects of the school.
- Inspectors also observed behaviour during lunchtime and spoke with staff and pupils.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and the online staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors discussed aspects of safeguarding with pupils, staff and governors. An inspector also met with the designated safeguarding lead to evaluate how well concerns about pupils' safety and welfare are acted on. An inspector scrutinised a range of documents related to safeguarding. This included recruitment information as held on the single central record.

Inspection team

Tonwen Empson, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Katie Brockway

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