

Inspection of a good school: The Wyvern School (Buxford)

Great Chart Bypass, Ashford, Kent TN23 4ER

Inspection dates:

17 and 18 January 2023

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. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Wyvern School is a joyous learning environment. From early years to sixth form, pupils enjoy their studies and benefit from positive relationships with staff and their peers. There is a strong sense of community and pupils feel happy and safe, including from bullying. This is shown in their desire to communicate with words, signs, ready smiles, laughter and 'high fives' throughout the day. Pupils who spoke to inspectors expressed total trust in adults to help resolve worries as well as care for them.

Behaviour at school is positive. The school values of 'Be independent, Show respect, Connect community and Spread happiness' underpin expectations and sit at the heart of the school. Simple rules, such as 'kind hands', coupled with daily routines help pupils to know what is expected from them. Staff treat pupils with dignity and are adept at supporting pupils who become dysregulated. Every day ends positively, so that pupils look forward to the following day.

Leaders are rightly prioritising urgent improvements to reading throughout the school. Additionally, leaders are working to ensure that the curriculum is consistently well implemented and that the oldest students are prepared successfully for their next steps.

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

There have been significant, recent changes to the school's leadership and governance. Four senior leadership posts are covered by those in 'acting' positions. This includes the acting headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, and two acting assistant headteachers. Various roles and responsibilities have also changed. For example, an experienced assistant headteacher has taken on the leadership of safeguarding and sixth form. Effectively led by the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, the new

leadership team has rapidly evaluated the school's strengths and aspects that need to improve.

Most staff are supportive of leaders and of changes being implemented to strengthen the school. However, some staff express concerns, including relating to workload and well-being. Leaders and governors are determined that Wyvern School should be a great place to work as well as to learn. Collectively, leaders are exploring what more they can do to ensure that staff feel valued and supported. More widely, governors are clear about their roles and responsibilities and convey ambition for Wyvern School and its pupils.

Pupils have a wide range of learning and medical needs. Individual needs are identified, known well and thoughtfully responded to. Overarchingly, the school's curriculum aims to provide personalised learning that enables pupils to reach targets set in their education, health and care (EHC) plans, as well as reflecting learning that is important to the pupils, their families and the health professionals who support them. The curriculum is set out in seven different 'pathways' matched to pupils' needs, capabilities, and stage of education. Each 'pathway' has different curricular aims.

Intentions for each curriculum pathway are established. The 'INSPIRE' (I- nurturing, sensory, personalised, individual, respectful, engaging) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) pathways are implemented effectively. More widely, there are inconsistencies across the school in staff subject knowledge and teaching skill, including effective use of resources to support learning. Consequently, pupils, including students in the sixth form, do not receive consistently strong opportunities to learn successfully. For example, while many staff are highly skilled in teaching communication and in the use of communication aids, not all teachers use the same symbol to carry the same meaning. Therefore, a pupil may need to relearn a meaning on transition to a new class or pathway, or may not understand information displayed around the school.

Many pupils are at the early stages of learning to read. Although now a current priority, the school's reading curriculum is not established, and the basics are not in place. Staff are insufficiently trained in teaching reading and there are not enough books at the right reading or content level for pupils to read, or experience. There is a lack of expectation about how often pupils should read or be read to, or the range of texts that should be shared. As a result, pupils do not consistently acquire a love of reading, nor do they gain the knowledge and skills to become confident readers.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the progress made by pupils in different pathways and phases of education. Staff reflect on pupils' engagement and learning in lessons and frequently adjust what they teach next. Staff and leaders review pupils' progress towards their EHC plan outcomes three times each year. New targets are set and displayed in classrooms. In this way, staff and pupils are clear about the next steps being worked towards.

Leaders have identified improvements required to sixth-form provision to better prepare students for their next steps. The content of the curriculum on offer, work experience and accreditations are under review. Over time, students' learning has not been supported effectively by suitable resources or age-appropriate reading and communication materials.

The wider curriculum is designed around pupils' needs and interests and also includes spiritual and cultural opportunities. Pupils' experiences include swimming, dance and participating in theatre productions. A 'pupil voice' group enables pupils to have a role in school development. The school values are integral to the work of the school and provision for pupils' personal development is, overall, of high quality.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

A strong culture for safeguarding is established. The leader for safeguarding conveys passion and expertise. Staff are recruited carefully and trained thoroughly. Governors and leaders are trained in safer recruitment.

Leaders and staff know the pupils and their families well. Staff identify and act upon concerns, understanding additional risks faced by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Systems to respond promptly to concerns are embedded. Information is treated with sensitivity, being shared as necessary to keep pupils safe and well. Leaders work with other agencies to ensure the right support is in place for pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not have a suitable curriculum for reading. Pupils' experiences of learning to read and engaging with texts vary too widely, including in sixth form. Staff are not adequately trained to teach early reading and resources are lacking. This means that pupils do not have good opportunities to become confident and fluent readers or to develop a love of reading, including engaging with books through listening, looking and touching. Leaders need to ensure that a clear reading curriculum is established so that expectations for reading across the school are known and enacted. Priority should be given to training teachers in early reading and in ensuring sufficient resources are available so that pupils read texts matched to their reading skills and stage of development.
- Not all staff have strong subject knowledge or understanding of the best ways to help pupils learn, including the most effective use of resources. This means that some pupils, including students in sixth form, do not progress through the curriculum as well as they might. Leaders should ensure that staff, throughout the school, use the most effective pedagogical approaches and resources consistently and in line with the school's expectations. Leaders need to ensure that these refinements lead to pupils knowing and remembering more.
- The sixth form does not consistently prepare students well for their futures beyond Wyvern School. Curriculum content is not always relevant or helpful. Opportunities for students to participate in accredited courses, work experience and to prepare for transition to a range of destinations are limited. This means that students do not approach adulthood with maximum independence and preparedness for future opportunities. Leaders should ensure that the work commenced to address these

weaknesses is continued and completed so that students are ready for their lives and choices beyond school.

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 September 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	131748
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10242129
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	358
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	48
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Stuart Finn
Headteacher	Penny Bullen (Acting Headteacher)
Website	www.wyvern.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Wyvern School is a large special school. The school is designated for profound, severe and complex needs. Pupils have a very wide range of learning and medical needs. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The former headteacher retired at the end of December 2022. Governors are in the process of recruiting a new, substantive headteacher.
- Wyvern School runs one primary and one secondary satellite provision, for pupils on the CLICK (confidence, leadership, independence, communication, knowledge) pathway, at nearby mainstream schools. The school also runs observation and assessment provision for children in the early years.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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 school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the acting headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher and all members of the senior leadership team. The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and the governor with responsibility for safeguarding. The lead inspector also met with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors met individually with leaders responsible for safeguarding, behaviour and attendance and personal development.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, communication, and the INSPIRE, CLICK and ASD pathways. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject or pathway leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning, looked at samples of pupils' work and heard pupils read. As part of the deep dives, the primary and secondary satellite provisions were also visited.
- Inspectors observed pupils' arrival at school and other informal times of the school day.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plan and reading action plan. Records of governing body meetings and visits carried out by the local authority were also scrutinised.
- The inspectors considered the responses to the confidential staff and pupil surveys. They also took account of the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and comments made by those who responded.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the lead inspector considered the school's website and policies, met with the designated safeguarding lead and spoke with staff and pupils. She scrutinised records of checks carried out on adults working at the school and scrutinised a selection of child protection records.

Inspection team

Hilary Macdonald, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Tom Neave

Ofsted Inspector

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