

Inspection of a good school: Applebee Wood Community Specialist School

Far Croft, Lostock Hall, Preston, Lancashire PR5 5SS

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 February 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?

Pupils enjoy school. On arrival, they receive a warm welcome from staff and a friendly catch-up with their friends. The happy atmosphere that leaders have created helps pupils to settle into school and feel safe.

Pupils engage well with the wide range of clubs on offer and the opportunities to enhance their personal development. Pupils recently learned to work together as cheerleaders and entered a local competition. They enjoy sports, outdoor activities and trips to theatres, cinemas and local cafes to develop their independence and communication skills. Staff nurture and encourage each pupil's interests and abilities.

Staff have high expectations of pupils. For most pupils, these aspirations are realised. However, for children in the early years and pupils at the early stage of learning, leaders have not ensured that staff have the right knowledge to deliver the curriculum well. These pupils do not learn what they should when they should.

Pupils trust the adults who care for them. Pupils are confident to talk to adults because they know that adults will listen to any concerns that they raise. Leaders and staff deal with any name-calling or bullying effectively. The student council works with leaders to produce pupil-friendly policies on anti-bullying and being kind to one another.

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

In the main, leaders have developed a broad and ambitious curriculum. This curriculum meets the specific special educational needs and/or disabilities of most pupils in the school. Most teachers choose activities that help pupils to know and remember more. However, this is not the case for children in the early years and pupils who are in the early stage of learning. Leaders have not provided sufficient support and training for teachers

and staff working in this part of the school. This means that teachers are not sure what pupils need to learn. Teachers' choice of activities is not aimed well enough at ensuring that pupils know and remember what they have been taught. This leads to some low-level disruption as pupils are not engaged in learning. Teachers in the early years do not use the education, health and care plans (EHC plan) as well as they might to help pupils reach their individual goals. As a result, the pupils in this part of the school do not achieve as well as they should. This limits their later learning.

In the rest of the school, teachers use assessment strategies well to check pupils' understanding and to inform the next steps in learning. Pupils gain nationally recognised qualifications, including GCSEs and vocational awards.

Reading is a priority in school. Teachers immerse pupils in stories, plays, music, rhyme and non-fiction texts. Teachers use drama, writing and discussion to bring characters to life. Pupils thoroughly enjoy acting out scenes from stories. This helps build their communication skills and helps them to remember what they have read. Pupils have many opportunities to read. Staff have a good knowledge of phonics and use this to ensure pupils' reading books help them to practise the sounds that they learn. The school library is a welcoming, well-resourced environment that is valued by pupils.

Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to develop their interests and talents. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award develops resilience, teamwork and independence. Pupils and students in the sixth form learn the skills that they need to camp, cook and map read. Pupils sing in the school choir and recently attended Manchester Arena to sing with other schools. Residential trips are well established and give pupils experiences away from home where they make fond memories with their friends.

Leaders and staff prepare pupils and students well for adulthood. From Year 7 onwards, pupils learn about opportunities for further education, training and work options. Careers fairs let pupils, parents and carers chat with a range of organisations, including colleges and training providers. Pupils undertake travel training to allow them to travel independently. Work experience is well established and has been the stepping stone into employment for a number of school leavers.

Pupils learn about other cultures and religions. Trips to temples, places of worship and themed days give pupils an opportunity to explore and celebrate difference. Pupils learn about positive relationships and being kind to each other.

In the majority of classes, pupils behave well, and there is little low-level disruption. Staff know pupils well and support them to manage their emotions and behaviour.

The vast majority of staff said that morale in the school is high. Leaders are considerate of staff's workload and well-being.

Governors have knowledge of the school's curriculum but they have not had a full picture of the early years or pupils attending off-site alternative provision. This has meant that governors' understanding of the quality of education in the school has not been accurate.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff training is up to date and thorough. This means that they are vigilant and quick to notice if any changes in a pupil's behaviour, appearance or body language may indicate a cause for concern. Leaders act quickly to secure the necessary help and support from external agencies, including the local authority, to keep pupils safe. Leaders ensure that all pupils attending alternative provision are safe.

Pupils learn how to stay safe in school, the community and online. Staff support parents to help with any concerns around staying safe online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not ensured that the staff working with children in the early years and pupils at the early stage of learning have the expertise that they need to deliver the curriculum well. This means that these pupils do not achieve as well as they should. Leaders should ensure that staff working in this part of the school have the skills and knowledge they need to ensure that pupils have the best possible outcomes.
- Governors have not held leaders to account and assured themselves that all pupils have a good-quality education. This has led to governors not having a true picture of the early years and pupils being educated off site. Governors should challenge and hold leaders to account to ensure all pupils in the school benefit from a high-quality curriculum that enables them to achieve well.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Lostock Hall Moor Hey School, to be good in November 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

Unique reference number	119880
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10256230
Type of school	All-through special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 18
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	7
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Carol Wooldridge
Headteacher	Michelle Padgeon
Website	www.applebeewood.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, the school's name has changed from Lostock Hall Moor Hey School to Applebee Wood Community Specialist School.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has a new headteacher
- The school has a temporary sixth form, agreed with the local authority, for a two-year period. The sixth form will close in July 2023.
- The school uses eight unregistered alternative provisions.
- All pupils at the school have an EHC plan. The school caters for pupils with a wide range of needs. These include autism spectrum disorder, moderate learning difficulties, social, emotional and mental health and speech, language and communication needs.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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, senior leaders, subject leaders and members of the governing body, including the chair. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading and communication, English, science and music. 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. An inspector also listened to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also looked at the curriculum in other subjects.
- During the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. They also spoke with leaders and staff.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents and carers expressed through Ofsted Parent View. They also considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Julie Bather, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Sheldon Logue

Ofsted Inspector

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