

# Inspection of a good school: The Chiltern School

Parkside Drive, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 5PX

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Inspection dates:

22 and 23 February 2023

## **Outcome**

The Chiltern School continues to be a good school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

All pupils are welcomed and valued at The Chiltern School, regardless of their needs. It is easy to see pupils' enjoyment of school by the smiles on their faces as they arrive each morning. Pupils love to take part in well-planned activities that make learning fun.

Pupils' development, well-being and happiness are at the centre of everything that happens at the school. All pupils are supported to achieve their best. Expert staff adapt what happens in the classrooms to help pupils succeed. As a result, pupils thrive, gain in confidence and make good progress in their learning.

Pupils behave well. They respond well to highly consistent routines. This helps them to identify and manage their emotions effectively. As a result, they enjoy their lessons and get on well with each other. This means that lessons are not affected by disruption. Staff listen attentively to pupils. They learn how individual pupils communicate so that they understand their opinions and feelings. As a result, there is a calm, purposeful atmosphere around the school.

Pupils know that bullying is wrong. They are confident that staff will act quickly to stop any unkind behaviour. This helps pupils feel safe and happy.

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

Leaders put pupils' needs at the heart of every decision. Leaders have made an informed decision to group pupils according to their need rather than their age. Leaders have used this approach successfully. This is ensuring that pupils' learning is tailored and meaningful.

Leaders have designed an innovative and ambitious curriculum. They place pupils' ability to communicate at the core of their learning. Expert curriculum and pathway leaders work together with the school's speech and language therapist to inform curriculum plans. Consequently, pupils have the right opportunities to practise language skills at each stage. Pupils at all stages of development complete suitable learning activities in each subject.

Knowledgeable teachers deliver these in an engaging way, so that pupils build securely on what they have learned before.

Leaders check for any gaps in pupils' knowledge. They identify how staff can most effectively help pupils to fill these gaps. Teachers only introduce new knowledge when pupils are ready. This helps many pupils to achieve well. Students in the sixth form successfully complete qualifications that help them in their next steps towards independence, further education, training or employment.

A few curriculum leaders are new to their posts. They have a less secure understanding of the impact that their subject curriculum has had on pupils' learning. These curriculum leaders do not know whether approaches to teaching and assessment are being used consistently well.

Pupils love listening to the stories staff read to them. They learn to enjoy and understand books, despite the difficulties they may face. There is a detailed phonics programme in place. Staff have had relevant training to develop the expertise they need in order to teach reading well. Pupils at an earlier stage of development gain confidence with the key sounds that they need to start to read. This includes children in early years. Pupils use alternative and supported means of communication if they need to. This ensures that all pupils are helped to communicate effectively.

The positive relationships between staff and pupils are a strength of the school. Staff work skilfully to help pupils understand routines and expectations. They create a safe and happy place in which to learn. Over time, staff successfully support pupils with specific behavioural needs to manage their own behaviour.

Leaders prioritise developing pupils as individuals. Opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the wider world are threaded throughout the whole curriculum. Pupils take part in the school's recruitment of staff. They learn about different faiths and cultures. There are high-quality opportunities, including in the sixth form, to prepare pupils well for adult life. They gain confidence in their ability to make informed choices, including how to use their leisure time.

Governors share the ambitious vision for what pupils can achieve. They hold leaders to account for ensuring that each pupil achieves their potential. The leadership team has clearly defined roles and responsibilities. All staff feel well supported. Staff are appreciative of the high-quality training opportunities they access. They value the care that leaders show for their well-being and workload.

Many parents and carers are positive about the support provided by the staff. However, leaders are aware that some parents were unhappy about some of the changes made following the pandemic. Some parents also feel that communication could be improved. Leaders are actively addressing these worries to reassure parents about the purposeful reasons behind the changes.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff give pupils' welfare and safety the highest priority. Staff are well trained. They are knowledgeable and vigilant for signs of harm. Staff pass on concerns promptly and appropriately. Leaders ensure that concerns are followed up with the appropriate agencies when needed.

Pupils know whom to go to if they have a concern. For some pupils who may not be able to explain their worries in words, staff are alert to any small changes in their behaviour. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe.

Leaders and governors ensure that they complete all required checks before adults work in the school.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some subject leaders do not know whether their curriculum plans are helping pupils to remember and do more. This is because they have not had time to monitor and check how well pupils are remembering what they are learning. Leaders should ensure that all subject leaders are given the opportunity to check routinely the impact the curriculum is having on pupils' learning and make changes as needed to make sure that pupils achieve the best they possibly can.

## 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 school to be good in October 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	109746
<b>Local authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10255255
<b>Type of school</b>	All-through special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	302
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	33
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Mark Cattle
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lisa Leonard
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.chiltern.beds.sch.uk">www.chiltern.beds.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	11 October 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The Chiltern School caters for pupils with a range of special educational needs. This include pupils with moderate, severe, and profound and multiple learning difficulties and pupils with autism spectrum disorder. A growing number of pupils also have complex social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Since the previous inspection, pupil numbers have increased significantly. All pupils are now taught on the same site.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first 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, members of the senior leadership team, and pathway and curriculum leaders. They also met with a group of early career teachers and teaching assistants. The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors. A meeting was held with an educational consultant employed by the school. An inspector had a telephone conversation with a local authority representative.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, communication and English, mathematics and creativity (art and music). For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with pathway and curriculum leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work or evidence of their learning. They also spoke to pupils both informally and formally about their views of the school.
- An inspector met with senior leaders separately to discuss behaviour, attendance and pupils' wider personal development. The lead inspector met with the school's speech and language therapist.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's single central record of pre-employment and safeguarding checks. An inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss the school's policy and procedures for keeping pupils safe.
- The inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View and Ofsted's staff survey. The lead inspector also spoke to a small number of parents on site and had a telephone conversation with a parent.

### **Inspection team**

Lynda Walker, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Suzanne Thrower

Ofsted Inspector

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