

Inspection of an outstanding school: The Westminster School

Hawes Lane, Rowley Regis B65 9AL

Inspection dates:

2 and 3 March 2023

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?

Pupils at The Westminster School embody their motto 'Safe, happy and learning together'. Leaders have created a nurturing environment where pupils are well cared for. They have high ambitions for all pupils. Leaders are determined to not allow any barriers to pupils' future success.

Pupils have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), such as learning, communication, social, emotional or physical. Leaders work closely with parents and carers to understand these needs. Effective provision supports pupils' individual SEND needs. Staff know that behaviour is a form of communication. Behaviour around school is exemplary.

Leaders have implemented a new curriculum. Pupils enjoy a range of exciting opportunities. However, leaders know there is work to be done to improve pupils' reading. Leaders have ambitious plans.

There is a high focus on preparing pupils for life outside of school. Leaders have set this as a high priority for all pupils. Leaders have formed strong links with the local community and employers. Leaders have clear plans for how to build pupils' skills. This supports pupils with future employment and educational opportunities. However, leaders have not identified how to build pupils' curriculum knowledge over time.

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

The newly formed leadership team leads with ambition and compassion. They want the best for their pupils, families and staff. Governors are highly supportive of the leadership team and the school.

Leaders have carefully designed a new curriculum. This offers a broad range of opportunities to meet pupils' individual SEND needs. It covers the breadth and range of the curriculum subject areas. Leaders have clearly set out the skills they want pupils to learn over time across the curriculum. Pupils make rapid progress against these. However, leaders have not identified the key knowledge they want pupils to learn across the curriculum. It is reliant on teachers identifying this for their individual pupils. As a result, it is not clear how knowledge progresses and builds over time across the curriculum.

Staff give pupils many opportunities to engage with a broad range of books and texts. Books for older readers are adapted to make sure they are accessible for pupils who are at the early stages of reading. As a result, older pupils can communicate about stories and texts which are at an age-appropriate level. However, many pupils who are at the early stages of reading are not getting the support they need regularly enough. Leaders have identified clear actions to improve this. Pupils love listening to stories and books but do not always enjoy reading them. This is because they find reading hard.

Teachers plan activities which are carefully matched to the individual SEND needs of their pupils. They use effective ways of assessing pupils' prior and current knowledge and skills. They use this information to plan activities and experiences for their pupils. Lessons are planned to provide opportunities for pupils to be independent learners but to also work collaboratively with their peers. Information is presented clearly.

Pupils are supported by a wide range of communication aids. These are tailored to meet individual needs. Pupils who do not use verbal language were able to communicate confidently with inspectors. They feel safe and happy, have friends and can name stories they enjoy listening to.

Pupils experience a wide range of enrichment opportunities. Leaders have a clear programme in place. For example, pupils experience archery and canoeing. They work towards the Duke of Edinburgh's and the John Muir Awards. A highly effective travel training programme is in place. This supports pupils to attend school independently either through public transport or walking. Pupils understand how this will help them in their future when going to college, work or meeting friends.

Careers education is exemplary at The Westminster School. Leaders have created a highly effective team dedicated to pupils' preparation for adulthood. The team works relentlessly to give pupils the opportunities they need for their future. This includes entering the workforce or further academic and vocational study. From an early age, pupils are exposed to a range of opportunities in careers. Leaders have a secure understanding of the local employment market. They support pupils with the necessary skills toward this. Leaders are innovative. They have created opportunities for employers to engage with pupils. The 'Westminstore' shop has been recently renovated by pupils through their skills in painting and construction. This shop will be run by pupils, who will sell products that they make.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding pupils is of the highest priority. Staff understand safeguarding is everyone's business. All staff, including transport drivers and escorts, receive effective training. Staff know their pupils well and can spot any changes in behaviour or character. This helps staff to identify signs of neglect or abuse for pupils with complex communication needs.

Leaders have strong links with external agencies. Pupils and families are well supported from the earliest point of need. Recruitment processes are thorough. Leaders make checks on staff and visitors to make sure they are safe to work with children.

Pupils learn about personal safety and how to keep safe online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not set out the key knowledge they want pupils to learn over time. They are too reliant on individual class teachers setting this out for their individual pupils. As a result, knowledge is not clearly sequenced and built upon over time across the curriculum. This limits the progress in knowledge pupils are making across the curriculum. Leaders need to identify the key knowledge they want pupils to learn over time and how this knowledge is built upon across the curriculum.
- Leaders have not yet implemented their plans to introduce a structured phonics programme for pupils at the early stages of reading. As a result, pupils at the early stages of reading are not receiving regular phonics teaching. This is slowing down pupils' reading progress. Leaders and governors should implement the identified plans and actions quickly, and ensure it is effectively embedded.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding 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	132233
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10257051
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	238
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	82
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Patricia Evans
Headteacher	Oliver Flowers
Website	www.thewestminsterschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	21 and 22 November 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The deputy headteacher took up the post of headteacher in April 2020. A new chair of governors has also been appointed.
- There have been several other changes to leadership since the last inspection. Two existing staff members took on the roles of deputy headteachers. There are now also two additional assistant headteachers.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) for moderate or severe learning difficulties. Pupils also have additional needs, such as autism spectrum disorder, speech, language and communication needs and/or sensory and medical needs.
- The school uses one registered alternative provision.
- 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.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, the chair of governors, governors, the deputy headteachers, the assistant headteachers, subject leaders, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally with parents, carers, transport escorts, drivers, staff and pupils to gather general information about school life.
- The lead inspector met a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, communication, mathematics, problem-solving, art, music and dance movement. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with areas of learning leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at additional areas of learning.
- Inspectors looked at individual pupils' EHC plans and checked these against the school's provision.
- The lead inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils formally and informally about their learning and experiences at school.
- Inspectors observed informal times to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- Safeguarding documents were reviewed, including the checks that leaders make on staff's suitability to work with children. The inspectors examined how staff implement safeguarding policies and procedures effectively across the school.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View and the free-text responses received during the inspection.
- Inspectors reviewed the responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's self-evaluation, school policies, curriculum documents and SEND records.

Inspection team

Anna Vrahimi, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Chris Pollitt

His Majesty's Inspector

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