

Inspection of an outstanding school: Colnbrook School

Hayling Road, Watford, Hertfordshire WD19 7UY

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 April 2023

Outcome

Colnbrook School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

A warm welcome from staff in the morning and adults' establishment of clear routines ensure that pupils are ready for the day. Pupils learn and live up to the 'Colnbrook way' of being 'ready, safe and kind'. They thrive on the positive relationships they form with others and settle quickly into school life. Pupils enjoy the opportunities on offer. They love learning in the outdoor areas and get great joy from reading to the school dog, 'Duggee'.

In this kind and friendly school, bullying and disagreements are very unusual. Nevertheless, if they do happen, adults quickly put things right. Adults provide exceptional support that helps pupils to deal well with social situations and handle tricky emotions. Pupils can communicate with each other and with adults about how they are feeling. They are safe and looked after well.

The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum is central to the school's success and permeates each part of provision. Every interaction is a learning opportunity for pupils to, for example, understand how to be good friends, explore a new language or know how to keep safe online. Pupils learn about how others are different from themselves. For instance, assemblies bring the school community together to celebrate each other's differences and similarities.

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

The curriculum consists of six thoughtfully designed learning areas, providing pupils with a springboard to access appropriate aspects of the early years framework and national curriculum. Leaders use their knowledge of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities to guide pupils into one of three 'pathways' to access the six areas. They break down into precise, small 'stages' the most important knowledge pupils need to learn. Leaders continually evaluate and critique their curriculum, and involve specialists, for example from the school's speech and language team, in its design.

Leaders use important information from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to create pupils' individual 'learning journeys'. Staff use this information to meet pupils' needs consistently well. Pupils' learning experiences are tightly aligned with their needs. Staff are expert in choosing ways that best help pupils to learn. They carefully plan activities that are highly effective in helping pupils to build on what they have learned before. Staff know what to teach and when because leaders have identified this clearly. All pupils progress extremely well from their individual starting points.

Staff closely monitor pupils' learning and development. They regularly carry out thorough checks on what pupils know and can do, finding out exactly what help pupils need and when. Staff design valuable 'next steps' for pupils. This means that pupils receive additional support if they need it or are provided with opportunities to pursue even more ambitious goals.

Books feature through all curriculum areas, so pupils are exposed to a range of different stories and ideas. Picture books and sensory stories make them more accessible. Well-trained staff use the school's phonics scheme effectively to make sure pupils know their letters and sounds. Pupils love books and reading, revelling in stories and songs in class. They regularly take books home to share with their families.

Leaders help to make sure pupils are ready for their next stage of learning. They work closely with pupils' families. Leaders carefully weave the social and emotional curriculum with key aspects of relationships and PSHE education. Pupils learn about important topics that support them to, for example, manage their emotions or learn self-care routines. As a result, they grow in independence and confidence.

Pupils' positive behaviour, and leaders' way of securing this, are note-worthy. All staff know how to support pupils with their behaviour, including a small number with complex behavioural needs. They sensitively manage incidents of challenging behaviour exceptionally well, so pupils' learning is not disrupted.

Leaders and governors want the curriculum to be the best it can be, but manage this in a way which does not create unnecessary pressure on staff. Leaders ensure that all staff access highly relevant training and support, so the curriculum gives pupils the best learning experiences possible.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

A culture of safeguarding pervades all aspects of school life. Leaders ensure that all staff are alert to, and know, the risks of harm to pupils. They act appropriate and swiftly to keep pupils safe. Leaders work in close partnership with a range of different agencies to ensure that pupils get the help and support they need.

Staff support pupils to understand the risks to themselves in school and out in the community.

Leaders carry out appropriate checks to ensure that adults are suitable to work with vulnerable pupils. They ensure that staff have the training needed to support pupils in a safe way.

Background

When we have judged 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in October 2013.

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	117670
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10212453
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Hilary McDermott
Headteacher	Caroline Aplin
Website	www.colnbrook.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	7 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder and speech, language and communication needs. A number of pupils also have severe learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school provides outreach services to other local schools.

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.
- Due to the nature of the specialist curriculum, inspectors carried out deep dives in the following areas: communication, language and reading, mathematics, and social and emotional development, including PSHE. In each area, inspectors met with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils, and looked at evidence of pupils' work.

- In addition, inspectors looked at pupils' personal targets and reviewed a sample of EHC plans.
- The lead inspector also reviewed curriculum documentation relating to understanding the world, which includes science, history and geography.
- The lead inspector held discussions with representatives of the local authority, including about safeguarding processes and procedures.
- Inspectors met with a range of school leaders over both days of inspection, including the school's outreach coordinator.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with the chair of the governing body.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the lead inspector met with the school's safeguarding leaders. He scrutinised training records and policies, and looked closely at safeguarding systems and processes. Across both days of inspection, inspectors spoke to pupils, staff and governors about safeguarding.
- The lead inspector scrutinised the school's behaviour systems, pupils' behaviour support plans, and logs of behaviour incidents.
- The lead inspector considered the 22 responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including free-text responses. The lead inspector also considered 39 responses to Ofsted's survey of staff.

Inspection team

Damian Loneragan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jackie Mullan

Ofsted Inspector

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