

Inspection of a good school: Heart of the Forest Community Special School

Speech House, Coleford, Gloucestershire GL16 7EJ

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 May 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. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are clear that they are happy at this school. They trust that adults will keep them safe. Pupils understand the importance of being kind to one another and comment on how staff teach them to 'look after each other and to respect other people.' Pupils behave well. They know what is expected of them and fully understand the 'behaviour zones.' Pupils always strive to behave well in class and during social times.

Pupils enjoy school and are keen to learn. However, leaders recognise that there is more work to do to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they can. For example, teachers do not check carefully enough what pupils have learned. This means pupils' errors and misconceptions are not always identified and corrected and so persist over time.

Pupils are keen to be involved with the wider responsibilities on offer. They enjoy the election process of being voted onto the school council. They welcome the opportunities they have to support decisions made in school. For example, by leading on the design and selection of the strip for the football team. Such activities help to develop pupils' social skills and prepare them for the next stage of their education.

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

The school is experiencing an extended period of staff change. Leaders face challenges in retaining and recruiting staff. They recognise the impact of these staffing issues and are seeking to recruit new staff to the school.

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils to receive a high-quality education. Leaders are determined they 'do not have a lid on what pupils can achieve'. However, they are aware that some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. This means that pupils do not gain

the knowledge and skills they need to enable them to succeed in the future. Leaders have plans to strengthen the education pupils receive, but these are in their early stages of development.

Leaders aspire that, where possible, pupils will become, at the very least, functional readers. However, some staff lack the knowledge and skills to teach phonics and early reading effectively. Pupils in the early stages of reading do not get sufficient opportunities to practise the sounds that they are learning. Books used to teach and practise reading are not always matched closely enough to pupils' stage in the phonics programme. This limits their reading fluency and accuracy. Staff do not consistently read stories to pupils. Consequently, pupils do not always encounter a wide enough range of books over their time in school. The mathematics curriculum sets out what pupils need to learn. However, this is new and not yet securely embedded. The planned curriculum builds' learning over time but is not sufficiently challenging. Additionally, staff do not routinely check that pupils have understood or secured important knowledge. As a result, some misconceptions are not identified or corrected.

Pupils' personal development is well considered. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to understand more about the wider world they live in. For example, pupils experience a wide range of activities beyond the school, such as trips to the Big Pit in Wales, the Willow boat ride on the river and a visit to a recording studio in Gloucester.

Pupils enjoy the additional activities and events available to them in school. Clubs such as circus skills, sports and forest schools are available for all pupils and well attended. 'The Heart of the Forest Got Talent' event held for charity was a firm favourite with pupils. Pupils took delight in the opportunity to entertain each other as poets, stand-up comics, singers or being member of the rock band. Such opportunities inspire pupils and help build their confidence and self-esteem.

Students have access to high-quality and impartial careers guidance. For example, they visit a local business park to experience the application and interview process. This helps them in preparation for applying for jobs and colleges when they leave the school.

Parents have mixed views about the school. Some are unhappy with the leadership of the school. They do not feel that leaders are approachable or listen to their views. However, other parents have confidence in the school and feel their children are thriving and the school meets their needs well.

Governors understand their roles and responsibilities. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are committed to working with school leaders to make the necessary changes to ensure pupils receive a high-quality education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders keep pupils safe in this school. They respond in a timely manner to support pupils in need of help. Staff carry out the required checks on the suitability of staff to work with

pupils. Leaders provide a curriculum that teaches pupils to understand risk, including healthy relationships. Pupils know that adults will listen to them if they have any worries. However, there are examples where safeguarding records lack sufficient detail. Leaders do not have sufficient oversight of actions taken about the support they provide for pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff respond to safeguarding concerns swiftly. However, sometimes, the information leaders record about safeguarding incidents lacks sufficient detail. Therefore, leaders could miss vital information. Leaders need to make sure that records clearly and consistently demonstrate the action taken in response to any safeguarding concerns.
- Some parents expressed concerns about the limited communication and availability of leaders to share their views. This results in some parents being unhappy with the school. Leaders need to strengthen links with parents to deal with any concerns quickly.
- In some subjects, leaders are not clear enough about the knowledge and skills they want pupils to know. This means that some pupils cannot remember the key knowledge taught across the curriculum. Leaders must ensure that they identify the knowledge and skills pupils need to learn in all subjects as they progress through the school.
- Some staff do not have a strong understanding of how to teach phonics or how to support pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read. This means that pupils do not gain the phonics knowledge they need to help them to read with accuracy. Leaders must ensure that teachers and teaching assistants have the knowledge and skills they need to support pupils to read.

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	134190
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10268905
Type of school	All-through
School category	Community 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	129
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	10
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Miles Johansen
Headteacher	Stephanie Withington
Website	www.heartoftheforestschoo.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 January 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has pupils with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities, including profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and moderate additional learning difficulties.
- The school does not 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 any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, assistant headteachers, school staff and four members of the governing body.

- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative from Gloucestershire local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, the 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.
- The lead inspector listened to a selection of pupils read to an adult.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding documentation, including the safeguarding checks carried out on staff working at the school. They considered how well the designated safeguarding leader acts on concerns about pupils' welfare and safety. Inspectors talked to pupils, staff and governors about how the school keeps everyone safe.
- The lead inspector considered key documentation, including the school development plan and school self-evaluation.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text replies and responses to the staff survey. The lead inspector viewed other correspondence received during the inspection and held a telephone conversation with a parent.

Inspection team

Jen Southall, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Katie Brockway

Ofsted Inspector

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