

Inspection of a good school: Weatherfield Academy

Brewers Hill Road, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 1AF

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 June 2023

Outcome

Weatherfield Academy continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils speak about how peaceful their school is. Most are at ease in their surroundings. Pupils, including those in the sixth form, develop trusting relationships with each other and with staff. Pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities, feel safe. There is little bullying. Pupils develop the self-awareness to resolve any 'little dramas' that occur. Pupils also trust adults to help them if they find things tough.

Most pupils respond splendidly to staff's high expectations for their behaviour. Pupils often collaborate with classmates as they go about their studies. They continue to develop social skills at break- and lunchtimes. Lunch in the dining hall is a happy, sociable affair as pupils show 'manners at mealtimes'. Pupils are keen to earn a green card and be eligible for one of the 'lucky little trips' that staff run for them.

Pupils study a combination of subjects from the national curriculum and courses focused on preparation for adult life. Pupils are taught, and like, to read. They make good use of the school's new reading room. Pupils love their time learning on the school farm and speak knowledgeably about how they care for the alpacas and other animals.

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

The number of pupils on roll at this popular school is growing. Mindful of this, and of pupils' changing needs, leaders are altering aspects of the curriculum. Leaders' ambition that pupils will 'become the best person they can be' underpins the broad, flexible curriculum they are adapting. In a few areas, leaders' work to develop the curriculum is not yet complete. Leaders have not evaluated the impact of some of the changes they have made.

Pupils' needs and potential are the starting point for the curriculum. Leaders provide staff with a comprehensive overview of each pupil's needs in a pupil progress report (PPR). PPRs are informed by a thorough induction programme through which leaders gather information from pupils, parents, schools and other agencies. Staff use PPRs to adapt the

curriculum that pupils learn and how it is taught. Leaders review pupils' PPRs so that teachers have up-to-date information and can adjust their teaching accordingly.

Leaders have invested considerable resources to promote reading. Many pupils develop and sustain a love of reading. Pupils read with adults every day. Pupils look forward to their visits to the 'colourful and unique' new reading room. Most adults use the school's chosen phonics scheme to give early readers effective support to become confident, fluent readers. On occasion, a few adults do not choose the most suitable strategies to help pupils tackle tricky words.

Subject leaders have laid out what pupils should learn. Leaders choose content that builds pupils' knowledge over time. Teachers have a good knowledge of most subjects. They give pupils regular reminders of what they have studied in the past. Teachers break down new learning into manageable chunks. In lessons, they usually communicate clearly and emphasise important words. Teachers are quick to spot and praise pupils' successes and move them on in their learning. Pupils remember important knowledge and gain confidence. Yet, this practice is not embedded in a few recently developed areas of the curriculum. Where this is the case, a few teachers' instruction and modelling of what they expect from pupils lacks precision. This means some pupils are less clear about what they are expected to do and their progress is slower.

Leaders provide pupils with high-quality pastoral support. For example, pupils have access to play, music, behaviour and speech and language therapists. Pupils learn important messages about respect and empathy. They become more confident, reflective and self-aware. This is evident in pupils' improving behaviour and positive attitudes to their education.

All pupils in key stages 4 and 5 study courses that prepare them for the world of work. Leaders have established productive partnerships with local colleges and businesses to prepare pupils well for the next stages of their lives. Pupils say the careers advice they receive helps 'open up [my] options'. They are well placed to make informed decisions about their futures. Over the past few years, all pupils leaving the school have moved on to further education, training or employment.

Governors and trustees seek, and make effective use of, external audits to hold senior leaders accountable for the impact of their work. Staff are proud to work at the school. They are playing their full part in the improvements being made. However, some staff expressed concern at the pace and volume of changes taking place.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Acting on the findings of external audits, leaders have made sure safeguarding is a prominent feature of the school's culture and work. Staff are alert to any signs that a pupil may be at risk of abuse. Leaders act promptly on any concerns that staff raise. This means pupils get the help that they need.

Pupils are taught strategies to keep themselves safe. For example, they understand the importance of keeping personal information private when online.

Governors make sure the school's single central record of pre-appointment checks reflects the robust recruitment processes in place.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum is changing. Some curriculum leaders have not checked the quality of what pupils learn. In a small number of subjects, a few teachers do not choose the most suitable content and learning activities. This means that pupils are not as clear about what is expected of them. Leaders need to complete their assessment of how well the curriculum is taught. They should then make sure that teachers deliver the curriculum equally well in all subjects.
- Leaders, including trustees and governors, need to take stock of the changes they have introduced. They should then review timescales to ensure improvements that they are making continue to be manageable and sustainable.

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 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	137896
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10268615
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
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	167
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	52
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jacqui Hunt
Headteacher	Joe Selmes
Website	www.weatherfield.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 and 22 November 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Weatherfield Academy provides education for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The number of pupils on roll has grown considerably over the past two years.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

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, other senior leaders and teachers and support staff.

- Inspectors met with several groups of pupils. Inspectors also observed pupils during break- and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors observed pupils learning in one off-site location.
- An inspector met with three trustees who are also members of the local governing body (LGB), including the chair of the trust and LGB.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, physical education and science. For each deep dive, inspectors spoke with school leaders and teachers, looked at curriculum documentation, visited lessons, spoke with pupils and looked at examples of pupils' work. An inspector also met with the curriculum leaders, considered curriculum documentation and looked at examples of pupils' work in a small number of other subjects and in the semi-formal curriculum.
- To check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of pre-appointment checks, looked at safeguarding documentation, spoke with pupils, staff and governors and spoke with a representative from Central Bedfordshire local authority.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in 22 responses to Ofsted's survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors took account of the views expressed in 48 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

John Lucas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lynda Walker

Ofsted Inspector

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