

Inspection of an outstanding school: Heaton School

St James Road, Heaton Moor, Stockport, Cheshire SK4 4RE

Inspection dates:

11 and 12 July 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. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Heaton School has a friendly and caring atmosphere. Pupils follow clear routines that help them to settle into lessons each morning and afternoon. Pupils, including those students in the sixth form, are happy and attend school regularly.

Leaders and teachers swiftly identify and deal with any unkind behaviours, including bullying. Pupils form positive relationships with their teachers and with support staff. This helps pupils to feel safe.

Pupils know that staff have high expectations of them. They achieve well socially, physically and emotionally. However, some pupils do not build their knowledge of some subjects as well as they could. Despite this, staff help pupils prepare well for adulthood through carefully designed activities. For instance, pupils learn about communication in social settings by creating their own café.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities. They enjoy educational visits to the theatre, zoos and museums. Some pupils also take part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Such opportunities enable pupils to forge friendships and to become increasingly independent. Pupils also receive hydro pool sessions and walks through the sensory garden. This helps to meet pupils' physical and sensory needs.

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

All pupils at this school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have recently refined the curriculum so that it increasingly meets the needs of pupils, including those with complex additional needs. However, in some aspects of the curriculum, leaders have not identified the smaller steps of knowledge that need to be taught. At times, in these areas, leaders have not considered carefully enough the order

in which pupils should learn knowledge. This means that some pupils do not acquire new knowledge and skills as quickly as they could.

Leaders and teachers work effectively with a range of specialists to provide tailored, bespoke and specialist support for each pupil, including those students in the sixth form. For instance, leaders use advice from occupational therapists, social workers and speech and language therapists to help assess pupils' ongoing learning and developmental needs. This information is skilfully used to design appropriate next steps so that the individual needs of pupils are typically met well. This level of specialist support enables pupils to access the curriculum from their various starting points.

Staff routinely check how well pupils are progressing through their personalised curriculum. In those lessons where pupils do not grasp new learning confidently, teachers adapt the delivery of the curriculum to support most pupils to catch up.

Communication is a high priority. Teachers are adept at enabling pupils to develop their communication skills so that they can engage in learning. Staff are well trained to help pupils to communicate via symbols, sign language and through the use of a range of different technologies. Over time, this helps pupils to develop their language and communication skills successfully.

Leaders are at the early stages of supporting those pupils who can recognise letters and sounds and are beginning to learn to read. Some staff have not had sufficient training to deliver the phonics programme consistently well. Despite this, leaders ensure that pupils regularly experience a range of books through the curriculum. This encourages pupils to engage with stories, songs and rhymes.

Leaders systematically support pupils to improve their behaviour over time. If the need arises, staff are quick to support pupils to regulate their emotions and behaviour. This enables pupils to reflect and make positive behaviour choices. Pupils are motivated and eager to learn. There is very little disruption to lessons.

Leaders have pupils' readiness for life beyond the classroom at the forefront of all that they do. They provide many opportunities for pupils to apply their learning to real life situations. For instance, staff help pupils to use public transport and go shopping successfully. Pupils learn about, and explore, the food and customs of different countries through a community breakfast. Pupils also engage in fundraising for a local foodbank and they hold a music festival to raise funds for charity. These activities help pupils to appreciate the importance of kindness.

Governors have not challenged leaders as effectively as they should have about the ongoing development of the curriculum. Nonetheless, governors fulfil their statutory duties well. Governors and leaders care about staff's well-being. Staff appreciate the support provided by leaders and feel that their workload is managed well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff complete regular safeguarding training. Staff quickly notice unexpected changes in pupils' behaviour and demeanour. This enables leaders to identify and support pupils who may be at risk of harm.

Leaders work closely and effectively with a range of external agencies. This means that pupils and their families receive timely and appropriate support.

Pupils learn about keeping themselves safe in an age-appropriate way. They learn how to cross the road safely. Students in the sixth form learn about safety in the kitchen. This includes how to handle hot food and sharp equipment safely.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, leaders have not finalised their curriculum thinking. This hinders how well some pupils progress through the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that they clearly identify the key knowledge that pupils must learn and the order in which they will learn this content.
- Leaders are at the early stages of implementing their phonics programme. This prevents some pupils from building up their knowledge of letters and sounds as quickly as they could. Leaders should provide staff with sufficient training to ensure that the phonics programme is delivered consistently well.
- Governors' checks on leaders' actions to improve the curriculum have not been as thorough as they should have been. This means that governors do not have a secure enough understanding of how well the curriculum is being developed. Governors should hold leaders more fully to account for the quality of education that pupils receive.

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 January 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	106173
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	10211054
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	101
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Terry Conlon
Headteacher	Jonathan Curtis
Website	www.heaton.stockport.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	1 December 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with SEND. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Pupils' primary needs are profound and multiple learning difficulties, social communication difficulties, physical disabilities and autism.
- There have been some changes to the staffing and governance of the school since the previous inspection. This includes the appointment of a headteacher, a deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, art and design and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with 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 pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke to members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. Inspectors also spoke to a representative of the local authority and the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in class and during breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors spoke with the leaders responsible for pupils' wider personal development, behaviour, careers and preparation for adulthood.
- During the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. They also spoke with leaders and staff about safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents and carers expressed through Ofsted Parent View. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils and staff.

Inspection team

Amina Modan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Dawn Farrent

Ofsted Inspector

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