

Inspection of a good school: Brackenfield Special School

Bracken Road, Long Eaton, Nottingham, Derbyshire NG10 4DA

Inspection dates: 28 and 29 June 2023

Outcome

Brackenfield Special School continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at Brackenfield Special School. Pupils' well-being and communication development are at the heart of the school. Leaders and staff put no ceiling on what they want pupils to achieve by the time they leave the school. Leaders have the highest expectations and unwavering ambition for the pupils. Pupils develop the communication skills and life skills to help them flourish in adulthood.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons and at social times is superb. Pupils enjoy their lessons, especially in English, life skills, mathematics and immersive experiences. They are happy in school and excited to share their experiences. There is a deep culture of respect and belonging. This happens through staff modelling clear expectations and their adoption of a personalised approach to teaching and learning. Pupils are proud to adhere to the school motto of 'belong, believe, be brave'.

The learning environment is calm, nurturing and ordered. Pupils who struggle to manage their behaviour receive expert support to help them get back on track quickly. Parents and carers are thrilled with the support and care their children receive. Comments such as 'this is a truly wonderful school' and 'staff take their time to help and support' are typical.

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

Leaders and staff have designed a curriculum that is ambitious for all pupils. It sets out the precise knowledge, skills and experiences pupils will gain, and by when. The four curriculum pathways, 'communicate, comprehend, decode and navigate', are uniquely personalised for each pupil's needs. Leaders create highly detailed plans which underpin the curriculum for each pupil. Each pathway promotes the independence of pupils from the very start, with a focus on careers and employment in adulthood.

Staff are ambitious for what they want pupils to achieve. They know their pupils exceptionally well and are highly skilled in adapting the work and experiences according to the needs of pupils.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge and present information clearly to pupils. This may include the use of communication boards, symbols, sign and voice. Some pupils require specialist equipment to aid effective communication to promote their learning. All pupils have an individualised 'learning intentions' plan. This links to their education, health and care plans. These plans enable teachers to carefully check what pupils know. Teachers use this information to plan ambitious next steps for pupils. Pupils revisit the knowledge and experiences they are not secure with. This reinforces their learning so that they can move on to the next part of their work.

Leaders prioritise communication, reading and English. There is a systematic approach to teaching early reading. All pupils receive daily literacy sessions, adapted to their age and stage of development. The well-trained staff team follows a consistent approach to the teaching of sessions. Pupils with complex needs enjoy repeating the sounds they hear. They do this to music, to dance, in art and while exercising. When pupils are able, teachers help them to identify letters and sounds. Pupils confidently read from books that match the sounds they know. They enjoy taking part in, and listening to, stories. Pupils also use Braille, Makaton signing, eye movement tracking and the use of communication devices to assist their reading. All pupils develop confidence and a love of communicating and reading.

Leaders have ensured an exceptionally strong focus on preparing pupils for independent living and their next steps in adulthood. The key stage 4 curriculum supports pupils to achieve appropriately ambitious accreditations in functional skills, mathematics and English. Pupils benefit from vocational experiences in the local community. Leaders provide focused careers guidance and links with local employers and agencies. This well-planned programme helps pupils to make decisions about their next steps after leaving school.

Leaders prioritise pupils' broader personal development. Pupils learn about, and celebrate, a range of cultures and faiths. Pupils are proud to be who they are. They are confident in being self-aware, looking after themselves and keeping safe. Pupils engage in a vast enrichment programme, including visits out of school.

The majority of pupils attend school regularly. However, there is a small group of pupils who are currently not attending school. Leaders are currently realigning their approach to tackling persistent absence. Their plans to address this are in the early stages.

Governors provide strong support and challenge to the school. They invest heavily in the staff and the innovations that leaders have introduced. Staff speak highly of leaders. They say that their well-being and workload are prioritised. Staff are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The approach to safeguarding is rigorous. Leaders and the staff team understand the needs of the pupils and community extremely well. Their training is up to date, specialised and regular. Leaders share weekly updates. As a result, staff quickly identify any concerns. Leaders take prompt action, involving other agencies, when needed. Leaders will challenge decisions made by external agencies if they do not feel they are appropriate. Staff are knowledgeable and therefore remain extra vigilant due to the additional vulnerabilities of pupils. Records are thorough, detailed and secure.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe. They are happy in school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A small proportion of pupils do not attend school as regularly as they should. Leaders are in the process of establishing the best approach to tackling persistent absence and school refusal. Leaders should ensure that they take appropriate, swift and effective action to secure high attendance for all pupils.

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 November 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	113031
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10227766
Type of school	Community Special School
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	159
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mica Coleman Jones
Headteacher	Trish Turner
Website	www.brackenfield.derbyshire.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 February 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher started in post in September 2017.
- This school has expanded its pupil numbers from 62 in 2017 to a proposed 170 in September 2023.
- A new building extension of four classrooms was opened in September 2022.
- Three modular builds were placed on site and opened in September 2021.
- Brackenfield Special School is a specialist school for pupils with complex communication challenges, autism spectrum disorder, speech and language communication needs and pupils with a range of other special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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 school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and a wide range of staff. The lead inspector met with a group of governors, including the chair, vice chair and governors responsible for safeguarding.
- The lead inspector discussed the school with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these curriculum areas: reading and communication, mathematics, independent living and preparation for adulthood. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders to discuss the curriculum, visited lessons, spoke with teachers and support staff, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector observed pupils reading.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding procedures, including the single central record, safeguarding policies and practices. Inspectors held discussions about safeguarding with leaders, staff and pupils.
- The lead inspector reviewed a range of curriculum plans, undertook a learning walk around the school, including in the early years, spoke to leaders and visited outside areas of the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation relating to self-evaluation, school improvement planning, external audits of safeguarding, attendance and behaviour, the curriculum and governance.
- Inspectors spoke with parents during the inspection. The lead inspector considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the online staff survey.

Inspection team

Gary Nixon, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Janis Warren

Ofsted Inspector

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