

# Inspection of The Bridge School

Sprites Lane, Ipswich, Suffolk IP8 3ND

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Inspection dates: 27 and 28 June 2023

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All pupils have severe learning difficulties. Most do not communicate verbally. Pupils find a voice at The Bridge School. They are helped to make their wants and feelings known. Pupils' strong relationships with staff help them to make themselves understood.

Pupils achieve well from their individual starting points. Progress takes place very slowly, over long periods of time. Pupils are helped to keep trying by skilled staff, who persevere alongside pupils and who do not give up. Pupils enjoy celebrating their successes and receiving rewards for their efforts.

Pupils behave very well. Some pupils' needs make it difficult for them to respond to instructions and follow rules. They are helped to try different strategies to manage their behaviour when feelings and emotions threaten to become overwhelming and out of control. Pupils get on well together and treat each other with kindness.

Pupils rightly feel safe at school. They are relaxed and comfortable in the school environment. Pupils enjoy the wide range of opportunities that are provided for them. For example, they go on residential visits, in many cases managing to stay away from home for the first time successfully.

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

Leaders have transformed the school since its predecessor was judged to require special measures in March 2018. Since the multi-academy trust took responsibility for the school, it has gone from strength to strength. The school is now securely good, with ambitions to be even better.

Leaders have thought very carefully about the curriculum. They have ensured it is fully focused on the needs of pupils. Leaders have worked on developing the curriculum across the full range of subjects. This work is better developed in some subjects than others. Where subjects are more developed, leaders have identified very small steps of learning for pupils. Leaders have identified the most important words for pupils to understand and use. Processes for checking how well pupils are learning are also well developed. Some subjects are less well developed in these areas. Where this is the case, pupils' progress is slower.

Staff understand that pupils' SEND mean that they all have different needs. Approaches that work well for one pupil may not work for the person sitting next to them. Staff are adept at adjusting what is taught, and how it is taught, to meet pupils' individual needs.

Pupils learn about a broad range of subjects. As well as learning about all the subjects in the national curriculum, pupils are given a wide range of other opportunities. For example, they go horse-riding, sailing and swimming, and have

cooking, music therapy and intensive interaction sessions. The school is very well resourced, both inside and outside. For example, it has a hydrotherapy pool, and sensory and soft-play rooms.

Leaders see communication as the heart of the curriculum. They recognise that helping pupils to communicate is one of the school's most important roles. The school uses a wide range of approaches to enable and encourage pupils to communicate. Staff focus strongly on finding the right approach for each pupil. For example, some pupils use Makaton sign language while others learn to communicate by using pictures and symbols.

Leaders put appropriate emphasis on reading. Staff help pupils to learn that symbols have meanings. They encourage pupils to listen to and notice different sounds. Staff share stories with pupils and use creative ways to capture their interest. For example, in Reception, staff provide small pieces of fruit for pupils to try as they tell the story of 'The very hungry caterpillar.'

The curriculum is well focused on helping pupils to prepare for adulthood. Throughout pupils' time at the school, leaders keep this crucial end point in mind. Most pupils are unlikely to be able to lead fully independent lives as adults. The school focuses well on helping pupils to develop as much independence as possible. There is also a strong focus on helping pupils to develop key skills, like being able to get on and off public transport safely, that will help them in their adult lives.

Many parents were very unhappy with the school when it began its improvement journey, and a small proportion have more recent concerns. Leaders have done a great deal to restore most parents' confidence in the school. However, a small minority of parents remain unhappy with, or distrustful of, the school.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have put robust measures in place to ensure pupils' safety. Staff know how to report concerns about the conduct of adults. They know that these will be taken seriously. Staff receive regular training to help them identify possible signs of abuse or neglect. They use the school's systems for reporting concerns very well. The designated safeguarding leads are tenacious in following up on concerns, to ensure pupils get the help they need. The curriculum is well focused on supporting pupils to develop skills that will help them to stay safe as they grow older and move into adulthood.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some subjects are less well developed than others. For example, in some subjects, the most important vocabulary for pupils to learn has not been identified fully and the approach to assessment is not completely established. Where this is the case, some pupils do not make as much progress as they could. Leaders should ensure that all subjects are fully developed so that pupils achieve as well as they can across the curriculum.
- A small minority of parents are unhappy with the overall effectiveness of the school. Of this group, some have lost trust in the school altogether. Where this is the case, relationships between parents and the school are strained. Leaders should take action to improve relationships with this group of parents and to re-build trust where it has broken down.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	147162
<b>Local authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	10277145
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special sponsor-led
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	171
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Christine Quinn
<b>Headteacher</b>	Hazel Simmons
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.thebridgeschool.org.uk">www.thebridgeschool.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	19 October 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The Bridge School converted to become an academy school in June 2019. When its predecessor school, also called The Bridge School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be inadequate and to require special measures.
- The school was sponsored to become an academy by Unity Schools Partnership. It has been part of the multi-academy trust since June 2019.
- The current headteacher joined the school in September 2019. There were a number of changes of leadership, of the predecessor school, between the last inspection and the school becoming part of Unity Schools Partnership.
- Significant building works have been carried out since the last inspection of the predecessor school. An extensive block of classrooms and other facilities has been built for secondary-age pupils. This is linked to the primary side by a corridor so that the school now operates as a single unit on one site.
- Although registered to take pupils from two years, no nursery-age children currently attend the school. This has been the case for some years.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils have severe learning difficulties, and some pupils have autism spectrum disorder. A small proportion of pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties.

- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Year 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 deputy headteacher and other leaders; the chief executive officer of Unity Schools Partnership and directors of the multi-academy trust; and a group of seven governors, including the chair of the local governing body. The headteacher was not present during the inspection due to an extended period of absence.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication, mathematics, 'my world', physical development, and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, 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.
- Inspectors also scrutinised a range of school documents, observed pupils and spoke with them during break and lunchtimes, observed procedures for pupils' arrival at school and their departure from it, and spoke with parents during the school's sports day for younger pupils.
- In order to check the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of pre-appointment checks, looked at records of child protection concerns, met with leaders and spoke with pupils. Inspectors also checked physical aspects of the school environment, including the functioning of door mechanisms and the suitability of fencing.
- Inspectors took account of 36 responses to Ofsted Parent View and 23 free-text comments. They also took account of 80 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

## Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Mary Abeyasekera	Ofsted Inspector
Ashley Best-White	Ofsted Inspector

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