

Inspection of a good school: Critchill Special School

Nunney Road, Frome, Somerset BA11 4LB

Inspection dates:

27 and 28 June 2023

Outcome

Critchill 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 enjoy coming to this welcoming, happy school. The strong relationships staff build with pupils and their families form the foundation for pupils' positive experiences at the school. Pupils' development, well-being and happiness are central to everything that happens.

The executive headteacher and her staff have high expectations for pupils' learning and achievements. Staff expertly support pupils to communicate effectively. They skilfully adapt what happens in the classroom so that all pupils can progress well through the curriculum. As a result, pupils thrive. They gain confidence, learn new skills and develop independence.

Staff manage pupils' behaviour well. Leaders train staff well to support pupils with complex needs. For example, if a pupil needs a break from class, staff use well-chosen strategies to help pupils re-engage. Pupils feel safe. They value the positive relationships they have with staff. Adults support them if they need to share any worries. Pupils say that bullying does not happen. They are confident that adults would deal with it quickly if it were to occur.

Pupils know their views matter. For example, pupils were deeply involved in the planning and implementing of the new playground. As a result, they now enjoy high-quality play equipment matched to their needs.

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

Leaders provide a curriculum that meets each pupil's needs. They place no ceiling on pupils' success, regardless of the complexity of their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff share leaders' determination that every pupil can develop the

independence and life skills they need to enable them to succeed. The education and care that pupils receive are of a high quality.

Leaders set personalised goals for each pupil based on a wide range of information. This includes each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan. These goals link the school's curriculum to individual pupil targets. The result is finely tuned, personalised learning across the school. Staff skilfully design well-sequenced learning. Consequently, pupils build their knowledge and skills in small steps.

Staff use assessment very well to identify any gaps in pupils' learning. They check the progress pupils make towards the targets in their EHC plans in every subject. School staff work closely with other professionals to ensure that pupils get the equipment and resources they need. This helps pupils to be successful in their learning. Pupils' work shows that they are making good progress towards their EHC plan outcomes.

Leaders prioritise reading. Staff teach phonics to pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read. The books these pupils read match the sounds they know. This helps them to grow in confidence in their reading. Pupils who are not yet ready to learn phonics understand that text, sounds and symbols all have meaning. Staff read books to pupils to encourage them to enjoy stories.

In early years, children get off to a positive start. Staff use music, song and creative activities well to engage children in their learning. As a result, children can sustain their concentration for longer periods of time. Leaders have identified the knowledge and skills that children need to learn in early years so that they are ready for Year 1.

Students in the sixth form learn to apply skills in unfamiliar situations. This includes work experience and work-placement opportunities. Other practical experiences include working on the school's outside catering van. This develops students' confidence, resilience and independence. They follow an ambitious curriculum that is highly bespoke to students' future aspirations and prepares them well for life beyond school.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils realise these expectations. They are polite and courteous to each other, to staff and to visitors. They enjoy their learning. Staff encourage pupils and students to aim high and adopt a can-do approach.

Pupils' wider personal development is integral to the school's work. Leaders design and sequence the curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) according to pupils' needs. Pupils build knowledge of how to keep themselves healthy and lead safe, active lives. They learn to respect and listen to each other. Planning for life after Critchill starts as soon as pupils join the school. From early years to the sixth form, staff encourage pupils to think about their futures. Pupils receive comprehensive careers education, information, advice and guidance. By the time pupils leave the school, they are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

Governors are well informed. They provide a good balance of challenge and support for leaders. Teachers feel that workload is manageable and that they are well supported by senior leaders. This allows them to focus on personalising learning, and to be innovative

with the activities and support provided. Staff told inspectors that they feel a strong sense of belonging to the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide staff with comprehensive and up-to-date safeguarding training. Staff understand their responsibilities well because of this. They know the signs that may indicate a child might be at risk and act quickly. Leaders follow up concerns swiftly. They are tenacious in following up on referrals to external agencies. Leaders make suitable checks to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with pupils.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe online and in the community. They also learn about safe relationships. Pupils understand how to raise any worries with a trusted adult.

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 predecessor school, Critchill School, to be good in September 2014.

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

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| Unique reference number | 147126 |
| Local authority | Somerset |
| Inspection number | 10268558 |
| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Academy special converter |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 86 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 8 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Stuart Warrener |
| Headteacher | Sophie Addison |
| Website | www.critchillschool.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with complex needs and severe learning difficulties.
- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school joined the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership in June 2019.
- The headteacher was appointed in January 2020. From September 2021, she became executive headteacher with wider responsibilities across schools in the partnership.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school does not use any alternative education providers.
- Critchill Special School converted to become an academy school in June 2019. When its predecessor school, Critchill School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.

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 and members of the senior leadership team.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English (including early reading), personal, social and health education, and mathematics. 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 scrutinised the school's safeguarding arrangements. They spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding. The lead inspector met with the designated leader and reviewed the school's systems and single central record.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View and considered the results of the Ofsted staff and pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Mark Burgess, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Claire Thomson

Ofsted Inspector

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