

Inspection of a good school: The Bridge School

Chadwick Road, Astmoor, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 1PW

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 July 2023

Outcome

The Bridge School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Warm and nurturing relationships exist between pupils and staff at The Bridge School. Pupils join this school because they have experienced difficulties in the past. They settle in quickly and soon start to do well. Pupils say that the school is welcoming, and that staff understand them well.

Pupils know that leaders and other staff expect them to do their best and to uphold the school's high expectations of behaviour. This helps pupils feel secure and safe in school. On the rare occasion that bullying occurs, leaders are thorough in their response. Staff support those involved to reduce the likelihood of it happening again.

Leaders are ambitious for pupils' learning. They want pupils in the school to achieve well. A variety of accredited courses are offered. Consequently, most pupils succeed in gaining useful qualifications, or rejoin mainstream schools to continue their education.

Pupils speak positively about activities such as visits to the theatre, outdoor learning and trips to museums. The curriculum teaches pupils how to keep safe, for example near water and when using the internet.

Overwhelmingly, parents and carers speak highly about the support provided by all staff. Parents commented on the positive changes that they have seen in their children since starting at the school.

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

Leaders analyse the underlying causes of pupils' needs and difficulties effectively. Before a pupil joins the school, staff work with the pupil's family and home school to build a current and accurate understanding of their needs. Staff develop high-quality, detailed plans to address all aspects of these requirements.

Leaders use this information to provide a curriculum that usually meets pupils' needs well. For most subjects, leaders have thought carefully about the content of the curriculum and the order in which to teach it. In many lessons, staff continually check pupils' learning. They often skilfully change the activity or task to make sure pupils remain engaged and learn well. However, in a small number of subjects in key stage 3, the knowledge that pupils need to learn, and the order in which pupils need to learn it, is not as clear as it should be. As a result, it is sometimes uncertain how new knowledge builds on pupils' previous learning. This stops pupils making as much progress as they could.

At key stage 4, pupils follow a curriculum that is adapted to their needs and aspirations. At the Murdishaw provision, pupils follow a carefully designed curriculum that supports their learning and their emotional needs. Pupils at the VLC 37 Vocational Centre learn vocational subjects, such as hair and beauty, mechanics and construction. These courses make sure that pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, training or employment.

Leaders have focused on supporting pupils with their reading. They provide targeted support for pupils who are at an early stage of reading. Staff are trained well to use age-appropriate interventions to help pupils read fluently and confidently. Reading for pleasure has a high profile in the school, and pupils clearly enjoy the books that have been carefully selected for them to read in class. Pupils read books that are suited to their abilities and their age. Leaders have exciting plans to extend provision further by creating a library area for pupils to enjoy.

All pupils in the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Assessment and observation are used to ensure that any further needs are identified clearly and comprehensively. This begins even before pupils join the school, through the transition programme. Pupils' needs are met carefully and successfully through the targeted provision that they receive.

Leaders and staff know each pupil well. They build strong and trusting relationships. They continually support pupils to develop positive attitudes and behaviours. Over time, pupils learn to understand and manage their own behaviour.

Leaders want to place personal development at the heart of the school's curriculum offer. However, at this present time, leaders have not provided staff with enough information about the specific knowledge that pupils need to learn during the personal development sessions. Pupils learn about how to keep themselves fit and well, about healthy relationships and about careers, but these topics are not covered in enough depth before moving on. This means that pupils are not provided with sufficient opportunities to expand their understanding in these areas.

Staff speak highly of the support that they receive from leaders. They say that leaders take account of their well-being and workload in their decision-making.

The school's management committee works closely with leaders, providing support and challenge. The committee is aware of the school's strengths and areas for development.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. There are robust systems in place for reporting and tracking any concerns about pupils' welfare.

Staff, and the management committee, take part in regular safeguarding training. They have a good understanding of safeguarding processes and procedures. Staff know when, and how, they should report any concerns that they may have. Leaders ensure that pupils receive the right support at the right time.

Pupils know that there are people to talk to if they have a concern or worry. In lessons and key worker sessions, pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a small number of subjects in key stage 3, leaders have not thought about the small building blocks of knowledge that are essential for pupils to understand in order to learn the curriculum well. This means that pupils do not make as much progress as they should. Leaders should ensure that, in all subjects, teachers are clear about the knowledge that pupils need to learn and the order in which it should be taught.
- Leaders have not provided staff with enough information about the specific knowledge that pupils need to learn during the personal development sessions. This hinders how well some pupils learn and remember important topics in depth. Leaders should ensure that teachers receive appropriate and detailed information about what should be taught about these important topics so that teachers are equipped to deliver pupils' personal development consistently well.

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 January 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	134321
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	10226072
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	73
Appropriate authority	The management committee
Chair	Steve Hornby
Headteacher	Nigel Hunt
Website	www.thebridge.halton.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	10 and 11 January 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses the services of five unregistered alternative providers/tutoring agencies.
- The school operates from three sites. The main school is The Bridge School, which operates from Chadwick Road, Astmoor, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 1PW. The school also has a number of pupils who are currently educated at the Murdishaw provision, which is housed at the Murdishaw Community Centre, Barnfield Avenue, Runcorn WA7 6EP. Some key stage 4 pupils complete some of their learning at the school's vocational centre, which operates from Unit 37, Arkwright Road, Astmoor Industrial Estate, Runcorn WA7 1NU.
- 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.

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 spoke with the headteacher, other leaders and members of staff. The lead inspector also spoke with members of the management committee, including the chair.
- Inspectors spoke to representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders from the alternative provision placements used by the school.
- Inspectors looked at a range of leaders' documentation, including self-evaluation and safeguarding documents. They spoke with leaders about the school's safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics and personal, social and health education. They talked with curriculum leaders, visited lessons, looked at examples of pupils' work, held discussions with teachers and talked with pupils.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in class and as they moved around the school. They also observed pupils at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. Inspectors also spoke to a selection of parents.
- Inspectors considered responses to the staff survey and met with a selection of staff.

Inspection team

Rebecca Sharples, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Julie Bather

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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