

# Inspection of an outstanding school: North Herts Education Support Centre

Briar Patch Lane, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire SG6 3LY

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Inspection dates:

12 and 13 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?**

Pupils enjoy coming to the school. Most pupils have had difficult educational journeys before they join the school. North Herts Education Support Centre gives them another chance and a positive new start. Increasing numbers of pupils return to mainstream school after spending time developing strategies to help them to do so successfully.

Pupils achieve well at the school. They know that leaders and staff want them to do well. Pupils are given the support and encouragement they need to feel positive about learning. This helps them to regain confidence and belief in themselves. Pupils leave school with GCSEs and other useful qualifications.

Pupils rightly feel safe at school. They develop strong relationships with staff that help them to feel secure. Pupils know that they can talk to staff if they have any worries or concerns.

Pupils behave well. They know that leaders have high expectations of how they should behave and they rise to these. Pupils gradually learn to take responsibility and to manage situations they find difficult while they are at the school. This helps them to be ready to move on at a point that is right for them.

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

The school's effectiveness fell after the previous inspection. Leaders have halted this decline, and the school is now improving again. Leaders have high aspirations for pupils. These expectations are having a positive impact on how well pupils achieve.

Leaders are clear about the school's purpose. They have ensured that the focus in key stage 3 is now on helping pupils to return to mainstream education within a term or two.

Leaders have put a suitable curriculum in place for this group of pupils. However, in some areas, the planning of this is not as precise as it might be. There is more to do both to address gaps in pupils' learning and to avoid unnecessary repetition of aspects they have already studied.

In key stage 4, the curriculum is broad and well considered. All pupils study English and mathematics to GCSE level. They also achieve a range of other qualifications, including City & Guilds and BTECs. This puts pupils in a strong position to move on to college courses and apprenticeships.

Staff have strong knowledge of the subjects they teach. They plan well-designed learning activities that engage and interest pupils. When pupils join the school, a range of assessments are carried out. This process is not always fully successful. Pupils' individual learning needs are not in all cases identified closely enough. This means that additional support is sometimes not as well targeted to address these as it could be.

Staff are skilled at earning pupils' trust and helping them to re-engage with learning. The school has a calm and positive feel. Pupils show interest in their learning and try hard with their work. Their books show the increasing pride that they take in their work as they move through the school.

Pupils are typically able to read competently by the time they join the school. Leaders have recently introduced a phonics programme to support pupils whose reading skills are less well developed. This is already having a positive impact on helping pupils to catch up quickly.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the heart of the school's work. Pupils are provided with a wide range of opportunities, such as visits to the seaside or museums, that many of them have not had before. All pupils in key stage 4 have weekly work experience to help them develop important social skills for adulthood.

Governors have the knowledge they need to fulfil their roles effectively. They know the school well and have an accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for development. Governors and leaders check closely on staff well-being. Staff feel supported with their workload and value the collaborative ethos.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have a strong understanding of the issues that many pupils experience beyond the school gates. They ensure that the curriculum helps pupils learn about risks around issues such as gangs and drugs.

Staff are well trained to recognise safeguarding concerns. They report their concerns promptly using the school's agreed systems. The designated safeguarding leads are knowledgeable about their role. They advocate well for pupils. Leaders take prompt and effective action in response to the concerns that staff raise.

Robust measures are in place to ensure that only suitable people are employed to work with pupils.

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

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

- The key stage 3 curriculum for pupils who attend the school for a short period of time is not fully developed. This means that, in a small number of cases, pupils miss some parts of subjects while repeating other parts unnecessarily. Leaders should take action to develop the curriculum further so that it fully meets the needs of short-stay key stage 3 pupils.
- Assessment, including baseline assessment, is not always fully effective in identifying pupils' individual needs. Where this is the case, interventions are not as well targeted as they could be, and pupils achieve less well. Leaders should ensure that pupils' individual learning needs are always accurately identified and strong measures are put in place to address these.

## **Background**

When we have judged a school to be 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 May 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130344
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10269013
<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	20
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Emma Flawn
<b>Headteacher</b>	Dan Nearney
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.northhertsesc.herts.sch.uk">www.northhertsesc.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	3 November 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- North Herts Education Support Centre is a school for pupils in key stage 3 and key stage 4 who have been permanently excluded from school or who are at risk of permanent exclusion. Almost all pupils are dual-registered at this school and their referring mainstream school.
- Pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) related to their social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school operates on two sites. Key stage 3 pupils attend the school's Briar Patch Lane site. Pupils in key stage 4 are based at 29 Bancroft, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 1LA.
- The headteacher joined the school in September 2021, on an interim basis, at the request of the local authority.
- On 1 January 2022, the school federated with another pupil referral unit, Stevenage Education Support Centre. The headteacher is now executive headteacher of both schools. The two schools share a single governing body.
- The head of centre joined the school on a secondment in September 2021 before taking on the substantive role in September 2022.

- Although the school is registered for pupils from age five years, it does not currently have any primary-age pupils. This has been the case for many years, and there are no current plans to admit pupils below Year 7.
- The school provides outreach services to local mainstream primary and secondary schools. In addition, up to 30 mainstream pupils attend the school's 'Wednesday Group' provision each week.
- The school does not use alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 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 met with the executive headteacher, head of school, subject leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector met with a group of four governors, including the chair of the governing body. The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority on the telephone.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, food technology, and hair and beauty. 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 listened to pupils reading and scrutinised a range of school documents. Inspectors spent time on both sites on both days of the inspection.
- 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 and spoke with staff and pupils.
- There were too few responses to Ofsted Parent View for results to be available. Inspectors took account of the six free-text comments that were received. They also took account of 32 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and five to Ofsted's pupil survey.

## **Inspection team**

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Philippa Holliday

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

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E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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