

# Inspection of Blackmarston School

Honddu Close, Hereford, Herefordshire HR2 7NX

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Inspection dates: 20 and 21 June 2023

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Inadequate**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Inadequate**

Early years provision

**Requires improvement**

Previous inspection grade

Good

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

Pupils at Blackmarston School are happy and well cared for. However, pupils do not receive a high enough quality of education. Over the last year, school leadership has not been consistent. Governors have not made sure that leaders have the time and capacity to develop and improve the school. This has meant that too many areas of the school's work have not progressed as quickly as they should.

Many pupils come to the school finding communication difficult. Leaders use a variety of strategies to help pupils to be able to communicate effectively. Staff understand their pupils well. They teach pupils to play and to have positive relationships with each other and with adults. As a result of this, many pupils develop their social skills over time.

Leaders are developing plans to provide rich opportunities for all pupils. Staff plan trips to the supermarket and provide opportunities for pupils to learn to ride accessible bikes. All pupils go swimming. These activities help pupils learn how to navigate the outside world with confidence. Some pupils have found out about a community farm in preparation for a visit, and others have watched visiting theatre groups.

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

The acting headteacher has a clear understanding of how well the school is doing and what needs to improve. However, she has been hampered in her work by a lack of clarity about leadership roles. Governors have not acted quickly enough to make sure that there is an appropriate leadership structure in place. They have not made sure that leaders have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Leaders do not have enough time to perform their roles. This has led to a lack of stability, and leaders have not made enough progress in improving the work of the school.

Leaders have planned a curriculum to meet the needs of pupils. Pupils learn to be independent and to understand themselves through their 'priority learning targets'. They learn these skills through appropriately planned subject curriculums. However, staff have not received training in all the subjects that they teach, and this means that, sometimes, pupils do not learn as well as they could. Leaders have developed a way of checking what pupils know and can do. However, assessment is not used well enough to identify what pupils need to learn or to do next.

Leaders are ambitious that all pupils should learn to read. They have worked with speech and language therapists to develop a reading curriculum to help all pupils be able to identify and then physically make the sounds that lead to learning phonics. This has been successful for those pupils who are at the earliest stages of communication. A phonics programme has been in place for two years. However, staff have not received effective training in how to deliver this scheme. This means that teaching of reading is not consistent, which in turn hinders pupils' learning.

Leaders are aware of this, but they do not have the time and capacity to make the changes that are required.

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is woven through everything that pupils learn. Pupils are taught to keep safe and to be able to identify their feelings. This helps them to manage their own behaviour.

Most children in the early years enjoy an exciting learning environment that encourages them to be curious and to learn to be increasingly independent. Leaders make sure that children are taught to manage themselves and learn how to cope in different situations in small incremental steps. As a result, children are settled. They are learning to communicate effectively with adults and with each other.

Leaders have adopted an approach to behaviour that builds on the positive relationships between pupils and adults at school. As a result of this, the number and severity of behaviour incidents have reduced significantly. However, there is a small minority of staff who do not feel confident in managing behaviour well, and this leads to inconsistencies in how well the behaviour needs of pupils are supported.

Governors have not discharged their duties well enough. They have not taken quick enough action to secure leadership in the absence of the headteacher. There are important areas of work, such as making sure that all policies reflect school processes and practices, that have not been tackled. They do not have sufficient oversight of the current work of the school.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that all staff are trained to identify the signs that pupils may be at risk. Staff report their concerns, and leaders act on them. Safeguarding leaders are experienced and well qualified. They are tenacious about making sure that children receive the help they need. Leaders make sure that appropriate medical and personal care plans are in place.

Governors do not oversee safeguarding diligently enough. Although all the necessary pre-recruitment checks are conducted on staff, these are not recorded well enough. Required checks on governors are not routinely completed. Governors are not aware of these omissions.

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

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

- Governors do not perform their duties well enough. This means that some important areas of the school's work, such as some basic safeguarding

procedures, are not secure, and school policies, processes and practices are not fully in place. Governors should make sure that they fully understand their roles and discharge their responsibilities well so that they can ensure that all pupils receive a high-quality education.

- Governors have not ensured that all leaders in the school have the time, expertise and capacity to perform their roles. As a result, over the past few years, many areas of the school's work have not maintained the standards they should. Governors should make sure that there is an appropriate leadership structure in place and that leaders have the time to perform their duties and the opportunity to support all staff to perform their roles well.
- The curriculum is not being implemented consistently well. This means that pupils are not being supported well enough to make the progress that they should during their time at the school. Leaders should make sure that all staff are given the training and support they need in order to develop the confidence and expertise to deliver all areas of the curriculum well.
- Leaders have not made sure that pupils at the earliest stages of reading are benefiting from a consistent, well-delivered phonics curriculum. In addition, the books that pupils are given to read do not match the sounds they are learning and are not always matched well to their understanding of the world. Leaders should continue to make sure that all teachers are trained to deliver the reading programme well, ensuring that books given to pupils precisely match the sounds they are learning.

## 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>	117052
<b>Local authority</b>	Herefordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10228257
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	94
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Andrew Firth
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mike Painter
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.blackmarstonschool.co.uk">www.blackmarstonschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	21 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and autism spectrum disorder.
- There are four children of nursery age who are taught in the early years class with children in Reception Year.
- The headteacher was not in school during the time of the inspection.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We deemed the inspection a graded (section 5) inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken it into account in their evaluation of the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors held discussions with the acting headteacher and other acting senior leaders and subject leaders.
- Inspectors held discussions with teachers, representatives of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, science and PSHE. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors visited other lessons across the curriculum.
- Inspectors met with members of staff, both individually and in groups, and spoke to pupils at various points during the inspection.
- Inspectors took account of responses to the staff survey, as well as the responses to Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors looked at records relating to behaviour, bullying, attendance, and safeguarding.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding arrangements by checking the school's approach to staff recruitment, scrutinising policy documents and meeting with the designated safeguarding lead.

## Inspection team

Claire Price, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Rachel Perks

Ofsted Inspector

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