

Inspection of a good school: Mabel Prichard School

Cuddesdon Way, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX4 6SB

Inspection dates:

12 to 13 September 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good 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. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Mrs L Wawrzyniak. This school is part of The Gallery Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Michelle Kay Willett, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Chris Scrivener.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school is an inclusive and caring environment. Every morning begins with a warm and enthusiastic welcome. Staff greet pupils with smiles and help them to settle happily into their classes. Positive, respectful relationships permeate the school. This helps pupils to feel safe and to form bonds and friendships.

Staff support pupils to communicate in their own unique and diverse ways, including through signing, gesture and assistive technology. Clear routines mean that pupils know what is expected. Behaviour is positive and there is a sense of order and calmness. Staff deal sensitively and kindly with any upsets and help pupils to manage their emotions.

Pupils benefit from a range of extra activities. Visits to the community café and an outdoor activity centre support pupils' social development well. Assemblies and the weekly choir sessions enable pupils to share experiences and celebrate success.

The school's curriculum is founded on the school's aim to prepare pupils for adulthood. Everyone aspires for pupils to realise their full potential. However, inconsistencies in the quality of education mean that not all pupils are currently realising this ambition. Significant staffing turbulence has also been unsettling and challenging for the school community.

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

The school is going through a period of change. Many staff are new to the school or new to their role. Despite strong recruitment efforts, the school has not been fully staffed for some time. Staff absence is high. This has contributed to inconsistencies in the quality of education.

The school works in close partnership with pupils' families and a multidisciplinary team of therapists and health professionals. This means that pupils' individual needs are identified and understood well. The curriculum is designed around three 'pathways' and pupils' personal learning goals related to their education, health and care (EHC) plans. The school makes sure that pupils' progress towards these goals is reviewed regularly. However, while there are some strengths in the school's curriculum and approaches, the ambition is not consistently as high as it should be for all pupils. Additionally, the small steps towards pupils' learning goals are not always precise or clear enough.

Communication is a strong feature of the school's provision and a priority from the early years. Staff are skilled in communicating, including through Makaton signing. Many pupils are non-verbal. Staff provide effective support to enable them to use alternative communication strategies. These include signs, symbols, objects and sounds of reference. Pupils learn to use these to express their needs, make choices and draw meaning from their environment. Staff notice and respond to nuances in pupils' behaviour, movement or expression. They are also alert to anything that may indicate a concern, recognising pupils' vulnerability because of their needs.

However, the school does not currently have a consistent approach to reading for those pupils who are able to learn how to read. While pupils benefit from story times and visits to the library, reading areas in some classes lack appeal and are not suitably stocked. This limits pupils' opportunities to engage with texts and develop their knowledge and enjoyment of reading.

The school ensures that learning is accessible to all pupils. Typically, staff adapt their approaches, resources and the physical environment around pupils' needs and interests. However, teaching approaches are not consistently effective. Sometimes activities are not crafted well enough around what pupils need to learn. Expectations of pupils are not always sufficiently high and sometimes pupils opt out of learning. Not all staff maximise opportunities for learning.

The school organises a wide range of meaningful opportunities to support pupils' social development, independence and preparedness for adulthood. At the community café, pupils learn how to choose and order items from a menu. They learn how to travel safely, including when on the school minibus, for example when going swimming. There is a well-considered approach to work experience for older pupils and students in the sixth form. Pupils are introduced to the world of work within the school environment. This helps to prepare them for carefully chosen external work experience placements. The school works closely with sixth-form students and their families to plan for a positive future for them beyond the school.

Staff enjoy working at the school, valuing the school's consideration for their well-being and the sense of teamwork in the school. However, some expressed concern to inspectors about staffing levels during the previous term. The school and trust have taken action to address these issues. This includes the appointment of additional temporary agency staff, pending the recruitment of permanent staff. Leaders have also taken steps to assure themselves of staffing levels in relation to safety, linked particularly to pupils' medical and personal care.

Leaders have implemented strong systems to enable them to keep close oversight of the school. Trustees and leaders have an accurate understanding of what needs to be improved. The school is refining monitoring and evaluation processes and its approaches to making improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Over the past year, there has been considerable staff turnover and the school has sometimes not been fully staffed. This has been very unsettling for the school community. It has contributed to inconsistencies in the quality of education. The trust needs to take action to stabilise staffing and reduce staff turnover. It needs to continue to maintain close oversight of staffing levels and staff deployment to ensure that these are appropriate and safe.
- The school's curriculum is still being refined. Some of the small steps towards pupils' learning goals are not yet consistently clear or precise enough. As a result, staff do not always have enough guidance about what they need to teach. The trust should strengthen the design, content and sequencing of the school's curriculum pathways that build towards pupils' long-term goals.
- There is variability in the effectiveness of teaching approaches. Some resources and learning activities are not sufficiently engaging. Sometimes, there is a lack of ambition and staff expect too little of pupils. As a result, some pupils do not engage with learning and do not progress through the curriculum as well as they could. The trust should ensure that staff have more consistently high expectations and use the most effective approaches and resources so that all pupils achieve well.
- The school has not ensured that there is a consistent approach to early reading. Staff have not received training about how to teach reading, including for pupils who are ready to learn how letters correspond to sounds. Books are not always aligned well enough to some pupils' needs, and reading areas lack appeal. As a result, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their reading knowledge or acquire a love of reading. The trust needs to ensure that plans to improve reading are fully realised. This includes giving priority to appropriate training for staff and ensuring that pupils have access to texts that meet their needs, interests and reading skills.

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 predecessor school, Mabel Prichard School, to be good in May 2019.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	147821
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10288090
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	118
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	22
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Chris Scrivener
Headteacher	Lucy Wawrzyniak
Website	www.mabelprichard.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties and pupils with autism. Many pupils have medical needs. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school operates across two sites. Children in early years and pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are based at the primary site on Cuddesdon Way. Pupils in key stages 3 and 4 and students in the sixth form are based at the secondary site on Sandy Lane West. The two sites are approximately one mile apart. The primary and secondary buildings adjoin mainstream schools.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The early years includes provision for two- and three-year-old children. At the time of the inspection there were no two-year-old children on roll.

- There have been some recent changes in the senior leadership team. A new head of primary was appointed to the school in September 2023. The head of secondary took up their post in September 2023.

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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met with two trustees, including the chair of the board of trustees. She held a separate meeting with the deputy chief executive officer and the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and early reading, physical development and music. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils informally in lessons and during breaktimes and lunchtimes. They took into account the views of staff during meetings with them and from their responses to Ofsted's confidential staff survey.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents through their responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and parents' free-text comments. An inspector spoke with parents on the morning of the first day of the inspection.

Inspection team

Sue Cox, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Martin Dyer

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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