

Inspection of a good school: Ivel Valley School & College

Hitchmead Road, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire SG18 0NL

Inspection dates:

19 to 20 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 be outstanding if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Ivel School and College is a special place where pupils thrive. 'Every moment counts', from the time they arrive to when they leave at the end of the day. Pupils love to learn. There is no ceiling placed on what they do or achieve. Pupils are highly successful because of high expectations staff have of all pupils.

Learning to communicate is at the core of the curriculum. Pupils quickly develop different ways to share their feelings and wishes. Adults know pupils well. Staff use their expertise to guide pupils' choices. This means pupils actively engage in their individual learning plans. As a result, they become confident and happy learners.

Pupils enjoy warm and nurturing relationships with adults. Adults quickly spot any support pupils need to manage their emotions. There are no distractions to pupils' learning. Clear routines create calm classroom environments. Pupils behave very well.

Pupils willingly share their views and opinions. They describe their school as 'fun'. Making friends is important at Ivel School. This is a highly inclusive school. Pupils understand how to treat one another with respect and support one another.

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

The school's curriculum is well designed. It is highly effective in meeting the pupils' wide range of complex needs. Curriculum plans are thoughtfully constructed. External experts and professionals have supported the development of the curriculum. There is a seamless link between the provision for pupils' academic and personal development. In physical education (PE), for example, pupils' therapeutic movement programmes are incorporated into planned educational activities.

The school's plans identify areas of learning that pupils will benefit from the most. Each area of learning includes different aspects, such as key life skills. This ensures that pupils' individual needs are carefully planned. The ambitions of the early years framework and national curriculum are woven into the plans. Essential knowledge is skilfully crafted and repeated as small steps. This ensures that pupils' understanding is secure before ideas become more complex. For example, in mathematics, pupils develop sound knowledge of number before applying to real-life problems.

Teachers deliver curriculum plans exceptionally well. Activities are matched effectively because of a strong understanding of pedagogy. Targeted training enhances the skills and subject knowledge of staff. They have a deep understanding of pupils' needs and the expertise to support them.

'Preparation for adulthood' is a golden thread in the curriculum. It starts in the early years. Children settle quickly because activities make use of their interests. Planned learning steps recognise how children interact to develop independence and confidence. As pupils move through the school, they continue to build their independence as they work through their personalised learning targets. Pupils achieve highly from their starting points.

In the sixth form there is a sharp focus upon destinations after school. A personalised curriculum supports students' choices. They build life skills through developing a greater understanding of risk and self-awareness. They learn about travelling safely and becoming independent. Functional skills and vocational qualifications help students to achieve their aspirations. Careers guidance is a key part of preparing pupils for their next steps beyond the school. Through the curriculum, pupils learn about different roles and jobs. Pupils explore different options by visiting colleges and workplaces. They work alongside school staff such as school site teams so they can experience working roles.

Sharing and reading books is an important part of the school's work. There is a systematic approach to teaching early reading. Pupils benefit from the opportunities for pre and early phonics lessons. Pupils use their phonics knowledge very well to read and write. Their love of stories is evident when teachers bring them alive through expressive voices and objects. Pupils enjoy selecting their own books using their very own library cards.

The provision for pupils' wider development is well thought through. Opportunities to learn about the community link to the plans in the curriculum such as 'travel training'. Regular trips and visits provide pupils with experiences of different places. Talents and interests develop through horse riding or 'Friday clubs'. These include gardening, coding and sewing. Older pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme to promote their character and resilience. Pupils' well-being is promoted through mindfulness and relaxation classes.

Staff appreciate the team approach leaders adopt and encourage. Their views and opinions are actively sought so that workload is well managed. School leaders provide detailed information to governors. They use this well to build their knowledge of the school. However, they do not have a precise understanding about the impact leaders' work has on all aspects of the school's provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Governors do not have a clear articulation of the impact of leaders' work in all aspects of the school's provision. This means that they are not able to provide robust challenge to hold leaders to account in everything they do. Governors should ensure that they use the rich information gathered about the school to fully evaluate its impact.

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 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](#)' 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	109739
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10288425
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	243
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	43
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Gillian Needham
Headteacher	Joe Creswick
Website	www.ivelvalley.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2 May 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school operates from three different sites: The main school is based at Hitchmead Road; key stage 2 and 3 in satellite classes at Biggleswade Academy; the sixth form is based at The Baulk.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. These are for severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school’s education provision.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and teachers.
- An inspector met with three governors, and the chair joined the meeting via a telephone call. The inspector also held a telephone conversation with a representative of Central Bedfordshire Learning Services.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading and communication, mathematics and PE, which includes physical development. For each deep dive, they 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 work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in another subject: understanding the world.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

Helen Jones

Ofsted Inspector

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