

Inspection of a good school: Kite Ridge School

Verney Avenue, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP12 3NE

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 November 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.

What is it like to attend this school?

Kite Ridge is a caring school full of committed staff who provide thoughtful care for pupils. Pupils arrive with highly complex needs that require one-to-one adult support at all times. Prior to their arrival, many pupils have missed out on educational provision for a significant period. Parents describe Kite Ridge as their last hope in nurturing their children to be able to communicate and achieve success in different ways.

The school adopts a positive behavioural support approach where staff are tuned into pupils' emotional and physical needs to teach them self-regulation. They know when a child may be anxious or agitated. Excellent communication helps to manage risks and diffuse stressful situations for pupils.

Academically, pupils are not thriving as well as they could. There is not an ambitious enough curriculum to help pupils develop the essential knowledge and skills they need. Aspirations for some pupils need to be higher in literacy and other subjects.

Adults skilfully adapt experiences so pupils do not miss out on invaluable life skills. Pupils can go shopping, travel on a bus and access gym equipment. The school's annual 'Kite Fest' summer celebration is a wonderful highlight. Pupils from other mainstream and special schools join Kite Ridge pupils in a musical extravaganza.

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

The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing staff recruitment struggles have altered the school's improvement priorities. Leaders want the very best for pupils and

prioritise pupils' welfare and safety first. But the school currently does not have the resources and expertise to deliver a high-quality curriculum. The team at Kite Ridge are full of passion and determination, but the ongoing challenges have taken their toll on staff.

Each child's personalised curriculum package is built from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans and ongoing assessments. However, the school's curriculum lacks rigour and the content of some subjects and pathways requires rethinking. Broad knowledge goals are mapped out, but these are not coherently sequenced into small, logical steps. This makes it challenging for staff in knowing what to teach now and next. Positively, the school has an ambitious mathematics curriculum with clearly identified knowledge building blocks.

The school's collective understanding of what constitutes high-quality teaching needs strengthening. Pertinent educational research is underused and staff often select activities without fully considering the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn. This then means that staff cannot effectively assess what pupils know and understand and where they need further teaching.

Communication and language development is front and centre of the school's provision. Staff employ a range of strategies, including Makaton signing and pictures to enable pupils to communicate. For pupils who are not yet able to read, there is regular immersion in environmental sounds to lay the foundations for the phonics curriculum. However, the school's phonics programme is not working well. Staff have not been expertly trained in how to teach early reading. Furthermore, some pupils are reading books that do not closely match the sounds they know so far. This hampers pupils' ability to read with greater fluency and speed.

Staff build trusting relationships with pupils, which in turn helps pupils stay calm. Each pupil has their own classroom to support educational provision and reduce behaviour incidents. Pupils learn to focus on their work. There is thoughtful co-production of pupils' behaviour support plans and risk assessments. A particular strength is the school's training for de-escalation strategies and knowing when physical intervention may be needed to keep everybody safe.

Careful thought goes into pupils' wider development. This includes sensible careers advice and adapted work experience opportunities. Strong transition work happens to support families with the best options as pupils move into adulthood.

The management committee brings a broad skillset that serves the school well. They know the school in depth and probe intelligently on pastoral matters. However, members do not have enough educational expertise to challenge the school's performance. This has led to them not always being clear on where the school needs rapid improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum lacks ambition in some subjects and pathways. It does not identify all the component knowledge that pupils will need to learn. This has an impact on the teaching of the curriculum and the amount of knowledge pupils acquire. The school needs to redesign some subjects and pathways so that knowledge builds cumulatively to suitable and personalised end points.
- There is not a complete, systematic phonics programme in place which provides pupils with what they need to learn to read, write and spell. Teaching activities and decodable books do not align well enough to the school's identified teaching sequence. Furthermore, staff have not had expert phonics training. The school needs to establish an ambitious phonics programme where all staff are fully trained to deliver it successfully.
- The school has not ensured that staff can demonstrate a secure understanding of what high-quality curriculum intent looks like and pedagogical approaches that work well to teach the curriculum. This has been further hindered with the struggles to recruit qualified teachers. The school needs to strengthen its professional development programme to ensure that content is informed by up-to-date educational research about curriculum planning and high-quality teaching.
- There has not been robust oversight of the quality of education. The school's self-evaluation of its performance has not pinpointed weaknesses that exist in the school's curriculum. Those responsible for governance need to ensure that the school is rigorously held to account for how well pupils are learning the planned curriculum.

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 March 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 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	138102
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10288017
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	Kathy Forbes
Headteacher	Steven Sneesby
Website	www.kiteridge.bucks.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	21 March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Kite Ridge is a day pupil referral unit. Since its last inspection, its designation changed and it ceased to provide residential provision.
- The school caters for pupils who have been, or are at risk of being, permanently excluded from other special schools. Therefore, all pupils have an EHC plan. Pupils on roll have a range of diagnosed conditions and disabilities. These include severe learning difficulty, autism, mental health difficulties and challenging behaviours.
- The local authority admits pupils at Kite Ridge on full-time placements that last for the remainder of a child's school education. When pupils leave the school, they typically transition to adult services.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- 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 educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- 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 senior leaders and staff. The lead inspector met with the chair and vice-chair of the management committee. He held a telephone call with a school improvement adviser from the local authority.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives into these subjects: reading, mathematics and physical and sensory. To do this, they met with subject teachers, looked at curriculum plans, had discussions with staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and children; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts children's interests first.
- As many pupils have communication difficulties, including some being pre-verbal, it was not possible to speak to most pupils. Adults were present when inspectors sought ways to gather the 'voice' of pupils.
- The views of staff and parents were gathered through discussions, Ofsted's online surveys and the school's internal processes for gathering parent feedback.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's self-evaluation and school improvement priorities, policies, curriculum documents, behaviour records, pupil profiles and commissioning agreements.

Inspection team

James Broadbridge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Martin Dyer

Ofsted Inspector

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