

Inspection of an outstanding school: The Bridge at HLC

Waterloo Road, Hadley, Telford, Shropshire TF1 5NQ

Inspection dates:

20 and 21 September 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. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

The Bridge at HLC is a caring and welcoming community. Pupils enjoy coming here. They are happy and safe. Partnership with parents and carers is at the heart of the school's work. Parents value being involved in their children's education. Parents consistently describe the school as 'like a family'. They enjoy celebrating with staff the progress that their children make.

Staff know their pupils very well. They understand pupils' wants and needs and use this knowledge to ensure that pupils' needs are met effectively. Staff are skilled at noticing the slightest changes in pupils' behaviour and step in quickly to refocus them or engage them in other learning. As a result of this, behaviour in classes is calm, and pupils usually do well.

Leaders make sure that pupils joining or leaving the school are exceptionally well supported. Parents and external professionals are extensively involved to make sure that pupils are ready for their next steps. Because of this work, pupils settle in quickly and start to do well.

Pupils access an extensive range of opportunities. Pupils enjoy sports, such as accessible ice-skating, horse-riding and tennis. Older pupils run an enterprise project in the form of a spring fair every year, which is one of the highlights of the school calendar.

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

Leaders are determined that all pupils will learn to communicate effectively. There is a very thoughtful strategy for communication development. Pupils use a variety of communication aids and tools so that they can communicate their wants and their needs to adults. Mostly, adults communicate effectively with pupils, and there is a positive

environment for social interaction. At these times, pupils communicate well. In early years, adults make sure that children quickly learn how to communicate. As a result, children in early years are getting off to a strong start. However, there are occasions when the school's communication strategies are not being used consistently. When this is the case, pupils' use of their communication aids is limited, and their communication is limited to binary choices. At these times, pupils do not learn to communicate as well as they could.

The school has developed a 'skills and knowledge curriculum' that identifies the important things that leaders want pupils to learn. For pupils with the most complex needs, the curriculum starts with awareness of the environment, while for other pupils, it leads to sophisticated subject knowledge. In some areas, such as science, the curriculum is well planned and well sequenced. The school has identified the experiences and knowledge that make sure that learning builds over time. In these areas, teachers deliver the curriculum well. In a few areas, the curriculum is not as well sequenced. This limits pupils' ability to make as much progress as they could. Teachers use the outcomes in pupils' education, health and care plans effectively to direct what pupils are learning. They use assessment well to identify pupils' next steps.

The school has introduced a phonics programme for all pupils. Staff have been trained to deliver this well. Most pupils are at the earliest stages of phonics awareness. Staff integrate phonics well into their teaching of communication. Some pupils are learning sounds, and a few are learning to blend these sounds. These pupils develop their reading skills well through carefully chosen reading activities.

In order to prepare them well for adulthood, all pupils experience an extensive range of opportunities beyond the curriculum. Older pupils engage in activities in their community, including learning the way to the nearby shops, going to the library and going to a local café. Pupils find out about hobbies and careers, trying things such as yoga, crafts and fishing, as well as a range of sporting activities, such as accessible ice-skating and swimming. Pupils are encouraged to continue participating in the activities they enjoy, and some pupils use activities such as yoga, massage and sensory stories as one of their reward activities.

Leaders work tirelessly to make sure that pupils experience the best quality of education and provision and to support staff to have the skills they need to deliver all aspects of the school's work. Leaders review their work continually. In some areas of the school's work, such as in attendance, the impact of this monitoring is evident. However, the school do not always analyse the information that they gather sufficiently well. Sometimes, this means that they do not identify the wider issue that needs addressing and so do not take the actions that will make the biggest difference. Governors know the school well. They discharge their duties rigorously and effectively.

Staff speak positively about working at the school. They value the support and training provided for them. Staff say that the school manages their workload well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are diligent in protecting pupils. They know their pupils' vulnerabilities and make sure that all staff are trained to spot any signs of potential harm. As a result, they have created an environment in which staff are vigilant and report any changes in their pupils' behaviours or presentation. Leaders act on these concerns appropriately.

A small number of pupils are educated in individual classrooms, and leaders have put in place appropriate risk assessments to make sure that the environment is safe for staff and pupils. However, these risk assessments are not monitored rigorously enough and they are not consistently followed. While pupils have not been harmed by this, the school is not managing the risks that it has identified well enough.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Staff do not use pupils' communication strategies consistently well, and this limits how well pupils develop their communication skills. The school should make sure that all staff, including those newest to the school, have the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver the communication curriculum effectively.
- A few areas of the curriculum are not as well sequenced as they could be. This limits pupils' learning in these areas. The school should review its curriculum to make sure that pupils learn the right things, in the right order and at the right time in all curriculum areas and subjects.
- The school does not always analyse the information they gather through their monitoring sufficiently well. This means that they do not identify some of the wider issues that are emerging and so they do not identify the actions required to secure improvement. The school should take a more systematic and strategic approach to its use of information to help it spot and resolve any potential weaknesses in the school's provision.
- There are appropriate risk assessments in place to ensure the safety of the few pupils who are educated in individual classrooms. However, these are not monitored rigorously enough and so risk assessments are not followed consistently. The school should make sure that all staff follow the processes that are in place.

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 2013.

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	123635
Local authority	Telford & Wrekin
Inspection number	10257052
Type of school	All-through special school
School category	Maintained
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	215
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	4
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Liz Hyner
Headteacher	Heather Davies
Website	www.thebridgeschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	16 January 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The school provides for a very small number of nursery-age children.
- The school has a key stage 1 class situated on an additional site.
- 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

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

This was the first routine inspection the school had 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 spoke with the headteacher and other senior leaders, other leaders, governors, two representatives from the local authority and a representative from the local authority speech and language service.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in communication and interaction, science, and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lesson, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors discussed the school's approach to early reading and visited some phonics lessons.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects and visited some lessons across the curriculum.
- 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 create an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation relating to the work of the school.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders and staff about the wider work of the school.
- Inspectors took into account the views of parents, including reviewing the responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also reviewed the responses to the staff survey.
- An inspector visited an off-site class.

Inspection team

Claire Price, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jane Edgerton

Ofsted Inspector

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