

Inspection of Welcombe Hills School

Blue Cap Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire CV37 6TQ

Inspection dates:

14 and 15 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

The headteacher of this school is Angela Fox. This school is part of Unity MAT, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Tracy Pearce, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Dews.

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff are dedicated and want the very best for their pupils. They know their pupils well. Staff work closely with families to understand the needs of the pupils who attend the school. As a result, Welcombe Hills is a happy school where everyone gets along with each other well.

Pupils behave well in class and staff give them the support they need when they need it. Consequently, pupils try their best in lessons and enjoy learning new things.

Pupils with the most complex needs have a curriculum that meets their needs well. However, those pupils following subject-specific learning do not benefit from a well-planned or well-sequenced curriculum. As a result, they do not achieve as well as they should.

The school makes sure that pupils are supported to learn to become increasingly independent. Sixth-form students make visits to colleges and workplaces in their community. Older pupils go on work experience and taster days to explore their talents and interests.

All pupils enjoy a range of exciting opportunities in and out of school such as forest school lessons, attending sporting competitions, and other local places of interest. The school has developed strong links to the Royal Shakespeare Company and pupils visit frequently.

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

The curriculum for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties is planned and sequenced well. The school has carefully selected the curriculum content so that pupils learn important skills and knowledge such as tolerating others and developing their resilience, feeding themselves and improving their physical health. Students in the sixth form have a curriculum that is tailored to meet their needs and prepares them for life beyond school. Older pupils regularly practise and apply their learning in real-life contexts. Students operate a cafe and invite people into school for social events, where they can practise social interaction with customers or their parents. However, the school has not made sure that the curriculum for pupils on the formal pathway is coherently planned. In many subjects, and in the early years, the school has not identified what pupils need to know and the order in which they need to learn it. As a result, teachers are not always clear about the precise information that pupils need to learn. This means that pupils are often engaged in activities that do not build their learning over time.

The school has recently introduced a new phonics curriculum to support pupils who are at the earliest stages of reading. Pupils read books that are well matched to their reading fluency and interests. However, not all teachers have the knowledge to

deliver the phonics curriculum with precision and so some pupils do not learn to read as well as they could.

Pupils with complex needs who are at the earliest stages of communication are assessed carefully and taught to use the most appropriate communication aids. This allows them to communicate their wants and needs and gives them a tool to access their learning. However, there is no shared communication strategy for all pupils in the school. Children in the early years do not benefit from an immersive language-rich communication environment. This means that they do not learn to communicate or build their vocabulary as quickly as they could.

Staff know their pupils well and recognise that pupil behaviour may be a way of communicating a worry or a concern. Staff always find the time to talk with pupils about any concerns they have. As a result, the school has suitable strategies in place to support pupils with managing their behaviour.

Children joining the school in the early years have a careful transition into the school. These careful transition arrangements continue as pupils move to new classes at the start of each year, which helps pupils settle back into school. Teachers know what the pupils have already learned and what they need to learn next. As older students approach transition into education and/or training, they are well supported by an independent careers adviser. Older pupils gain valuable work experience and take part in a range of external placements in the local community. Many older pupils attend taster sessions at the local colleges. Through these visits, they are able to test out their interests and talents.

The school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum teaches pupils how to be healthy, stay safe and prepares them for life and work. Pupils learn about different cultures. They understand the importance of tolerance and respect and about protected characteristics. The school has woven this content into the PSHE curriculum so that pupils can learn and revisit important knowledge over time. This helps pupils retain key information that will help to keep them safe. Personalised support is provided to those pupils who need it.

Trustees are committed to improving the school. However, they do not always receive the information that they need to help them know how well the school is performing and so have not put the right support in place quickly enough. This is because leaders have not consistently monitored some aspects of the school well enough to identify those things that need improving. As a result, some areas of the school have not improved as quickly as they should.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are diligent in safeguarding pupils and are tenacious in following up any concerns. Staff are trained to spot any signs of potential harm and report them.

Consequently, pupils get the support they need to stay safe. The school ensures that families are well supported.

Although the school carries out most pre-recruitment checks, there were some gaps in records. For example, some references were missing and the school has not made sure that all overseas checks were done. Leaders have not monitored this well enough and so they had not identified these gaps at the time of the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The formal pathway does not identify ambitious endpoints for all pupils, and the school has not clearly identified the important knowledge that pupils need to know and when they need to learn it. This means that pupils do not benefit from a well-sequenced curriculum that allows them to build their learning over time. Leaders should review the curriculum for the formal pathway and make sure that they have identified what pupils should learn and in which order.
- Communication strategies are not systematically taught and promoted across the school from early years and across the school. This limits pupils' ability to communicate well. Leaders should have a clear communication strategy and ensure that all staff are trained to implement this well.
- The phonics curriculum is not consistently well implemented. This means that pupils are not learning how to sound, segment and blend words well enough. This is stopping some pupils from learning to read fluently quickly enough. Leaders should make sure that all staff have the necessary expertise to deliver the phonics curriculum well.
- Leaders at all levels do not have sufficient oversight of all the work of the school. This means that improvements are not being made quickly enough. The trust should make sure that all leaders have the necessary skills and time to be able to monitor and improve the areas of the school for which they are responsible.
- The school does not make sure that all pre-recruitment checks are conducted and recorded well enough. This means that leaders cannot easily assure themselves that all pre-recruitment checks are in place. Leaders should make sure that all pre-recruitment checks are in place and recorded diligently.

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	145486
Local authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	10290644
Type of school	All-through Special
School category	Academy 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	183
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	30
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jon Dews
Headteacher	Angela Fox
Website	www.welcombe-hills.co.uk/
Dates of previous inspection	14 and 15 September 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils who have moderate, severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The school is part of Unity MAT.
- There were no two-year-olds on the school roll during the time of the inspection.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider.
- The school operates from two sites. The second site is at 185 Drayton Avenue, Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire CV37 9LD.
- 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued 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, the CEO, director of school improvement from the trust, others leaders, trustees and the external school improvement partner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: language and communication, early reading, science and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- 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 created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents provided by the school.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders, staff and pupils about the wider work of the school.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's records of behaviour, including bullying, and records of suspensions. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors took into account the views of parents, including reviewing Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors viewed the staff survey.

Inspection team

Jane Edgerton, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Dawn White	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Smith	Ofsted Inspector

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