

Inspection of an outstanding school: The Russett School

Middlehurst Avenue, Weaverham, Northwich, Cheshire CW8 3BW

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 December 2023

Outcome

The Russett School continues to be an outstanding school.

The headteacher of this school is Emma Leach. This school is part of The Russett Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Emma Leach, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Carrie Rowley.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at The Russett School. Prior to joining the school many pupils have faced significant challenges in accessing education. The school is transformational for them. Pupils feel safe, accepted and proud to be a part of the school community. They receive the highly personalised care and support that they need to succeed in their education.

The school sets extremely high expectations for pupils' learning and development. It is unwavering in its commitment to ensure that each pupil can access a curriculum that is matched precisely to their individual needs. From a wide range of starting points, pupils are expertly challenged and empowered to progress in their next steps of learning. Pupils achieve exceptionally well.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They understand that they are part of a community where everyone respects each other. The school ensures that all staff share strong values and consistent approaches to managing pupils' behaviour. Pupils are skilfully supported to recognise their own emotions and to regulate and continually improve their behaviour.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of experiences to enhance their wider development and promote their independence. For example, pupils take part in regular trips and residential experiences. They are encouraged to develop their talents and interests in areas such as music, by singing as part of the school choir.

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

The school has created a curriculum that is highly ambitious for every pupil, regardless of their age or stage of education. It uses a range of assessment information to identify

pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), as well as their individual stages of development. From the early years through to the sixth form, pupils are placed on particular pathways of learning. This allows them to access the curriculum at a stage that is appropriate for their learning and development. This is supplemented extremely well by a range of expert therapeutic support that helps to remove barriers to pupils' learning.

For some pupils, including children in the early years and students in the sixth form, their curriculum pathway is centred around communication and engagement with others. Pupils engage in structured pre-reading activities and are exposed to environmental sounds. In this pathway, the school has meticulously identified the knowledge and skills that pupils should learn across a range of subject areas. Teachers expertly identify and assess the small steps of progress that pupils make and introduce new learning at exactly the right time. Pupils achieve extremely well as a result.

The curriculum pathways for other pupils are centred around foundational learning in communication, reading, numeracy and personal, social and health education. This helps pupils, from the early years to the sixth form, to gain practical knowledge and to become increasingly independent. Pupils also study an increasing range of specific subjects. This provides a breadth and depth of learning to meet their needs. From this strong basis, the school supports pupils to explore their interests and talents with their future steps and aspirations in mind.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge and expertise related to pupils' SEND. They adapt the delivery of the curriculum expertly to meet the wide range of pupils' needs and stages of development. Teachers are adept at checking what pupils have learned. They use the information that they gather from these checks to inform their teaching. This ensures that pupils build consistently well on what they already know and can do.

The phonics programme has a significant impact on pupils' ability to communicate and read with fluency. All teachers are trained to be experts. They deliver the programme with a high level of confidence and skill. Some pupils, who are not able to access the full phonics programme, receive input from specialist speech and language staff. Teachers use a range of activities, including sensory approaches, to expertly increase pupils' engagement and attentiveness so that they can communicate more effectively. All other pupils at the early stages of learning to read learn new sounds systematically each week. When they can confidently apply their phonics knowledge, pupils are supported in daily reading groups to develop their comprehension.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, pupils' attendance rates declined. The school has worked effectively to analyse and understand the causes of pupils' absence. It has put in place a range of strategies and support mechanisms that have had a positive impact on improving pupils' attendance at school.

The school has improved its approach to managing pupils' behaviour. Staff model and reinforce routines and respectful behaviour. Pupils learn how to be polite, take turns, share and communicate. This promotes a calm and respectful atmosphere where all pupils can learn without disruption.

The school's strategies to support pupils' personal development are woven seamlessly through the curriculum and beyond. Pupils have regular opportunities to practise interacting in social situations and to learn new skills, for example, by volunteering in the local community. They learn about how to live in modern society and how to keep themselves safe, including online. Pupils also learn about religions and cultures that are different to their own.

The school provides a wealth of opportunities for pupils to learn about different career and vocational choices. Pupils benefit from the expertise of staff who provide coaching and support for work-related learning and life beyond school. When appropriate, pupils receive advice and work experience opportunities that are tailored to their individual needs and interests. This allows them to progress onto more independent social care places, college courses or supported apprenticeships.

Trustees offer a strong level of support and challenge to ensure that the school continues to improve the quality of education that pupils receive. Staff are proud to work at the school. They receive high quality training that supports their professional development and career interests. Staff are involved in changes and decisions that the school makes. This helps them to manage their workloads effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 predecessor school, The Russett School, to be outstanding in July 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	142302
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10290302
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	124
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Carrie Rowley
Headteacher	Emma Leach
CEO of trust	Emma Leach
Website	www.therussetlearningtrust.co.uk/russett-school
Date of previous inspection	17 July 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of The Russett Learning Trust.
- All of the pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan. The school provides for pupils who have severe learning difficulties and/or complex learning needs and autism.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in years 8 to 14 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no two-year-old children on the school's roll.

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 carried out deep dives in early reading and communication, mathematics and personal social and health education. For each deep dive inspectors met with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. An inspector spoke to leaders about the curriculum in a range of other subjects.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the trust board, including the chair of the trust.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, who is also the CEO of the Russett Learning Trust, as well as other senior leaders from the school.
- Inspectors spoke with some pupils about school life. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted staff survey and spoke to a range of staff to discuss the support that they receive from leaders.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View. This included the free-text comments.
- 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

Amanda Downing, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sue Eastwood

His Majesty's Inspector

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