

Inspection of a good school: Kemball School

Beaconsfield Drive, Blurton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST3 3JD

Inspection dates:

6 and 7 December 2023

Outcome

Kemball School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Lisa Hughes. This school is part of Orchard Community Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the senior executive leader, Rob Johnstone, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gillian Howell.

What is it like to attend this school?

There are high aspirations for all pupils at Kemball School. Pupils rise to these high aspirations. The school understands every pupil's barrier to learning. It meticulously plans how to remove these barriers. Consequently, pupils are happy and achieve very well at this school.

Pupils have a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including complex and profound needs. Leaders are creative and find ways to understand what pupils know and remember. Staff give pupils extensive opportunities to show what they can achieve. The school's approach is summed up by its philosophy, 'If you don't try then you never know. Assume that pupils can and facilitate making that happen'.

Pupils' behaviours are well understood by highly skilled staff. Pupils behave calmly in classrooms and around the school. They are supported to understand their own emotions and encouraged to reflect with an adult on the rare occasions when they have displayed less positive behaviour.

Older pupils enjoy a number of leadership opportunities. This includes the chance to apply to become head boy and head girl. In addition, pupils take care of the school garden and help younger pupils during lunchtime. These opportunities promote pupils' social development and sense of responsibility well.

Parents and carers are very positive about the support and care their children receive at the school.

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

The school has created an ambitious curriculum. Pupils learn a broad range of subjects through four learning pathways. Leaders have carefully designed these pathways to meet the specialist and academic needs of pupils. In most subject areas, leaders have identified the essential knowledge they want pupils to learn. They are also beginning to establish what key vocabulary they want pupils to learn. However, this is not the case in all subjects. In these subjects, the school has not identified the essential knowledge it wants pupils to know and in what order. This means that pupils are not building knowledge over time in a sequential way.

All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school quickly establishes the most appropriate communication systems for all pupils. This means that from the very start, pupils can express their thoughts and needs. Staff are skilled in using a wide range of communication systems and aids. This includes signing, visuals and special electronic devices. Staff implement these systems effectively and consistently most of the time. The school works very closely with parents and external agencies. In addition, there are robust systems in place to identify and review pupils' needs.

The school is relentless in ensuring that all pupils leave able to read. Pupils are taught to read exceptionally well at Kemball School. Reading is given high priority, with daily phonics and reading sessions. Pupils who do not communicate verbally can read accurately as a result of the school's work. Pupils use electronic devices, as well as touch and eye gazes, to read. Furthermore, leaders have identified the key texts and poetry all pupils will experience. A carefully chosen selection of books helps pupils to develop their understanding of diversity and social issues. All of this means that pupils enjoy and experience a wide range of high-quality texts.

Classrooms are calm and purposeful. Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive. They want to learn and build their knowledge. Pupils show excitement when they have achieved well during lessons. Relationships between adults and pupils are respectful. Pupils know they are well cared for and respond positively as a result.

The school has a well-planned offer in place to promote careers education, information, advice and guidance. The school works closely with pupils and parents to understand the future aspirations of every pupil. The school supports pupils well to access appropriate pathways for their future.

Pupils can access a number of lunchtime activities, including clubs in computing and drawing. Pupils visit the theatre and botanical gardens. They raise money for several charities. Pupils expand their experiences further through the trust's '16 by 16' programme. As part of this programme, pupils can build a den, visit a museum or go barefoot for a walk.

Staff and external agencies are overwhelmingly positive about how the school is led. Staff feel very well supported by the school and trust leaders. They say it is a happy place to work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some parts of the curriculum, the key knowledge and vocabulary leaders want pupils to learn are not defined or sequenced clearly. This means pupils are not building their knowledge in a clear, logical order. The school should ensure that the essential knowledge and vocabulary are identified in all parts of the curriculum and sequenced clearly over time.

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 predecessor school, Kemball Special School, to be good in November 2012.

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	146497
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	10294641
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
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	218
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	7
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gill Howell
Headteacher	Lisa Hughes
Website	www.kemballschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, there have been several changes. Pupil numbers have grown exponentially. The school joined the Orchard Community Trust in July 2019. There have been several changes to the leadership structure, including an assistant headteacher promoted from within the school. There are now also dedicated leaders who oversee curriculum pathways.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. These mostly support communication and interaction, severe learning difficulties, and profound and multiple learning disabilities. Pupils also have additional needs such as sensory and medical needs.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider.

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.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, chair of the trust, additional representatives from the trust, local governors, subject leaders, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally with parents, carers, transport escorts, drivers and staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with one representative of the local authority and with a leader from one alternative provider. The lead inspector also spoke with the trust's school improvement partner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, communication, mathematics and history. 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 looked at additional subject areas.
- The lead inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils, formally and informally, about their learning and experiences at school.
- Inspectors observed informal times to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 considered responses to the online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments. Inspectors also looked at responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's self-evaluation, school policies, curriculum documents and SEND records.

Inspection team

Anna Vrahimi, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gail Brindley

Ofsted Inspector

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