

Inspection of a good school: Horton Lodge Community Special School

Rudyard, Leek, Staffordshire ST13 8RB

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 January 2024

Outcome

Horton Lodge Community Special School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy at Horton Lodge Community Special School. They arrive at school smiling and excited. Pupils' individual needs are well understood. They are well cared for by experienced staff.

The school's motto of 'working hand in hand to achieve potential' is realised here. Staff work closely with parents, carers and agencies. Together, they have created a strong community of support around each pupil. As a result, each pupil thrives at this school.

Leaders have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Staff see behaviour as a form of communication. They take time to understand what pupils are communicating and, when necessary, provide quick and effective support. This helps pupils to stay calm and settled in lessons and around school.

Strengthening independence and communication skills is central to pupils' learning. The school's approach of conductive education supports this. Daily activities focus on targeted physical movement as part of the specialist curriculum for pupils.

Pupils experience a range of trips and activities. The school ensures that pupils with physical disabilities are able to access these opportunities. For example, older pupils take part in adventurous activities during residential trips. They also visit the theatre. All this helps to promote pupils' independence further.

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

Since the last inspection, the school has made many positive changes. A new leadership team has focused on creating a curriculum that carefully meets the different needs of pupils. This curriculum is aspirational and has clear end points. Improvements have been made in many subject areas, particularly mathematics. The curriculum is designed to promote pupils' communication, independence and movement successfully, including in the early years. However, in some areas of the curriculum, the school has not explicitly

defined the knowledge, skills and vocabulary it wants pupils to learn to reach the ambitious end points of the curriculum. In these areas of the curriculum, it is not clear in what order pupils will learn essential knowledge. This means that the knowledge of some pupils does not build over time in a logical way.

Most staff are highly skilled and specialised in planning lessons for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan to support their physical disabilities and other associated learning difficulties. Staff also support areas associated with communication, sensory, social and emotional needs. Leaders carefully and quickly establish the most appropriate communication strategies for each individual child. They set out these strategies in individual specialist plans for pupils. Teachers use their expertise to deliver well-structured lessons in line with pupils' individual specialist plans. Staff use a range of communication systems and strategies in lessons and throughout the school day. All of this means that staff accurately meet the specific needs of pupils with SEND very well.

The school has a sharp focus on improving reading across the school. All classrooms have a wide range of books for pupils to enjoy and take home. Pupils love stories, reading and being read to. Their faces become animated when adults talk about books. Leaders are ambitious for pupils. They believe that all pupils have the potential to become readers. This focus on reading starts from the very beginning when pupils join the school. Pupils at the pre-reading stage are supported to identify environmental and instrumental sounds. Some pupils in the early years are beginning to identify letter names and phonemes. However, there is some variability in how the structured phonics programme is delivered to some pupils. This slows the learning of some pupils.

Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and respectful. Staff know individual pupils and their families very well. Staff use this knowledge positively to support pupils in lessons and at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Many pupils use additional, specialist equipment to support their mobility. Pupils form trusting relationships with the adults who look after them. For example, pupils have great confidence in the adults who help them to use additional specialist equipment to support their mobility.

Pupils experience a wide range of activities beyond the curriculum. Staff meticulously plan these activities so that pupils have the best experiences possible. These opportunities include residential trips away from home. Pupils greatly value these opportunities and talk about them with a great sense of achievement and enthusiasm. In addition, leaders ensure that pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe. For instance, pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe when online. All of this means that pupils are well prepared for their futures.

Staff feel well supported by the leadership team. Governors understand their roles well, and they fulfil their statutory duties. They support and challenge leaders effectively. Many parents are very happy with the care given to their children. Information sharing between the school and other agencies is highly effective. This includes the residential provision at the same site as the school. All this supports pupils' learning and ensures that they are always safe.

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 areas of the curriculum, the school has not explicitly defined the knowledge, skills and vocabulary it wants pupils to learn. It is also not clear in what order pupils will learn essential knowledge. This limits the progress of some pupils. The school should ensure that the curriculum clearly defines, in a logical sequence, the knowledge pupils will gain over time.
- There is some variability in the implementation of the structured phonics programme. This is not always implemented in a clear, systematic way. This slows the progress in reading for some pupils. The school should provide staff with the knowledge and skills to deliver the phonics scheme effectively.

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 February 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	124496
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10257034
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	59
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jon Harris
Headteacher	Lucy Bloor
Website	www.hortonlodge.staffs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 October 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, there have been several changes to leadership. The headteacher took up post in September 2021. A deputy headteacher was also appointed.
- The school offers a specialist curriculum which places conductive education at the centre of its practice.
- There is a residential provision on site called 'Kiplings', which is in a separate part of the school. This is led by the same headteacher. The inspectors only inspected provision at the school.
- All pupils have an EHC plan for physical disabilities and/or associated learning difficulties. Pupils also have additional visual, hearing and/or speech and language difficulties and medical needs.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provider.
- There were no two-year-olds on roll during this inspection.

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, chair of governors, additional representatives from the governing board, subject leaders, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally with transport escorts, drivers and staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with one representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, communication and mathematics. 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.
- The lead inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- 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

Julie McBrearty

Ofsted Inspector

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