

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Chessbrook Education Support Centre

Tolpits Lane, Watford, Hertfordshire WD18 6LJ

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Inspection dates:

6 and 7 February 2024

## **Outcome**

Chessbrook Education Support Centre continues to be an outstanding school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Many pupils arrive at Chessbrook having previously had negative experiences of education. They appreciate staff taking the time to get to know their individual needs before they start. Through this careful induction, staff build a clear picture of how to re-engage pupils with their education.

Pupils build incredibly positive relationships with staff. A warm greeting from staff at breakfast helps pupils to settle into the day. 'Personalised Learning Mentors' provide high quality academic and pastoral support to pupils. This helps them to build their confidence.

Pupils understand this is a place of learning. They work hard in their lessons. During off-site activities, pupils strive to meet the very high expectations the school has of them. This helps pupils to focus on what they are learning and secure the knowledge and skills they need for their next steps.

Pupils appreciate the many opportunities the school thoughtfully plans for them. For example, pupils learn how to box in the gym and how to use horticultural techniques in the school garden. They also learn conversational skills in the hair and beauty salon. These opportunities teach pupils valuable life skills. This in turn instils the courage, pride and resilience pupils need to be successful as they leave Chessbrook.

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

The school is committed to providing a high-quality curriculum that enables pupils to successfully return to mainstream settings or move on to appropriate post-16 destinations. Staff have worked together to design an exceptional curriculum that is bespoke to the individual needs of each pupil. The curriculum sets out what pupils will learn in a logical order. This helps teachers to plan and teach lessons that build pupils' knowledge and skills over time.

Thorough and precise assessment during the induction process helps the school to understand pupils' gaps in knowledge. Teachers then use this information to adapt the curriculum to pupils' needs and fill these gaps. For example, in English, teachers often focus on pupils re-engaging with reading to inspire them to learn across the whole curriculum. Pupils benefit extensively from this. They enjoy the range of books they study and how the school constantly exposes them to high-quality literature. Additional reading sessions help pupils to become more confident and fluent with their reading. This helps pupils access the curriculum in other subjects.

Staff are experts in how to teach and support the pupils they work with. Leaders provide staff with high-quality and ongoing training. This enables staff to grow professionally. It also helps them to manage their own workload and wellbeing. Staff are incredibly positive and passionate about working at Chessbrook and the support leaders give them.

The school has clear and precise systems for identifying the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff use individual progress plans intelligently to provide pupils with the right support at the right time. Regular reviews of these plans help the school to understand and plan for pupils' next steps.

The school has established clear and consistent approaches to help pupils improve their behaviour. Pupils learn how to manage their feelings and emotions. They do this well. This helps them to develop positive relationships with staff and other pupils.

Pupils have many valuable opportunities to develop and discover their interests and talents. For example, opportunities to learn about mechanics, construction or horticulture show pupils that different routes to success are possible. The thoughtfully designed wider offer also makes learning relevant through visits to places such as RAF Hendon or the Chiltern Hills. Through this work, pupils re-ignite their interest in learning. They develop positive attitudes to school which in turn improves their attendance. This serves pupils well when they return to mainstream settings or move onto the post-16 destinations.

The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum is a golden thread that flows through the school. Staff adapt this curriculum carefully to meet the specific needs of each individual. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and the importance of healthy, positive relationships. Well-considered careers guidance and advice supports pupils to accurately identify what their next stages in education might be.

The management committee has clear oversight of the work of leaders. They share leaders' ambitions for pupils to achieve well. Their expertise and experience enables them to support leaders and hold them fully to account.

## **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 school to be outstanding in May 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	130349
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10295018
<b>Type of school</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>School category</b>	Pupil referral unit
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	23
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The local authority
<b>Chair</b>	Michael Jones
<b>Headteacher</b>	Steve McShannon
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.chessbrook.herts.sch.uk">www.chessbrook.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date(s) of previous inspection</b>	10 July 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Chessbrook Education Support Centre provides onsite education for pupils in key stage 3 and key stage 4 with social, emotional and mental health needs who are at risk of or have been permanently excluded from education. They do not currently admit pupils onto the school roll in the primary age range.
- The school provides outreach support for pupils, families and schools across the primary and secondary age range through its extended services team.
- The school is commissioned to admit pupils from Hertfordshire local authority. A fair access panel convenes to consider places for pupils who are at risk or have been permanently excluded from education in the local authority.
- The headteacher was appointed in April 2019.
- The school uses nine alternative providers to support with the teaching of the curriculum. Eight of these are unregistered and one is registered with Ofsted.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this ungraded inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteachers, the special educational needs coordinator, subject coordinators, staff, governors, a provider of alternative provision, a representative of the local authority and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading and English, mathematics, physical education and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to pupils read with a familiar member of staff.
- Inspectors also considered evidence from religious education, music, art and horticulture.
- 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 reviewed a range of documents, including behaviour logs, bullying records, attendance records, pupil records, minutes of governing body meetings, school development plans, records of visits from the local authority and school policies.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents through their responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, alongside written communication received during the inspection. Inspectors also took account of responses to both the Ofsted pupil and staff survey.

Michael Williams, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Caroline Dawes

Ofsted Inspector

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