

Inspection of an outstanding school: Furze Down School

Verney Road, Winslow, Buckingham, Buckinghamshire MK18 3BL

Inspection dates:

20 and 21 February 2024

Outcome

Furze Down School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils deserve to be proud of their achievements in this extremely nurturing and orderly school. Highly trusting and respectful relationships between pupils and staff are the hallmark of daily routines. Skilled staff sensitively calm down any anxieties that pupils might have. Pupils feel safe and settle quickly into the school's secure routines. They demonstrate impeccable attitudes. One pupil said, 'Furze Down is the greatest school we have ever been to.'

Staff encourage pupils to aim high and celebrate success at every opportunity. Their unwavering commitment to pupils' growing sense of independence dovetails seamlessly with the school's values. Many pupils have experienced previous challenges with education and have not attended school regularly for a long time. This means that they have significant gaps in their learning. Staff tackle these head on, working steadfast to identify and address these gaps to help pupils catch up quickly.

An interesting range of extra-curricular activities such as crocheting, horse riding and horticulture harness pupils' talents and interests. Pupils value the opportunities that they have to volunteer at the local café, help distribute the parish newsletter and assist at the farm. Managing the popular 'Tea Trolley' and 'Stem Shop' helps older students hone their entrepreneurial skills.

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

Furze Down School is an exceptional place for all pupils. The curriculum is far-reaching, diverse and exciting. Across all phases, the curriculum is superbly sequenced. It supports pupils with very complex needs exceptionally well. The school develops a comprehensive understanding of each pupil's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff use this information to craft a highly personalised curriculum that is both aspirational and matched carefully to pupils' health and care plan (EHC) targets. The school thoroughly monitors the effectiveness of the curriculum. This means that the curriculum is routinely

adapted to the varied and growing needs of the pupils who attend the school. As a result, irrespective of their starting points, pupils excel in all areas of their learning.

Staff receive first class training. The school continually considers the latest research in learning and behaviour in relation to pupils' EHC plan targets and starting points. Expert staff meticulously check that pupils receive the right resources and equipment to help them enjoy their experience of education. Important ideas and vocabulary are revisited steadily so that pupils do not feel overwhelmed or become dysregulated. Staff continually check how much pupils have learned to ensure that they are being given the right work at the right time. As a result, pupils know what they are learning and why. They are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education. Older students gain GCSE and functional skills qualifications.

Pupils are enthusiastic readers. An expertly designed phonics programme ensures that, irrespective of their SEND needs, pupils learn to read quickly and independently. The key skills of literacy are actively promoted at every opportunity. Across all phases, staff provide books that hook pupils' interests, stimulate their imagination, and help them practise the sounds they are learning. Younger children delightfully listen to the stories and poems that staff read and share throughout the school day.

In lessons, learning is rarely interrupted as pupils settle to work promptly. An in-depth and proactive analysis of each pupil's pastoral needs and possible triggers underpins calm and purposeful classrooms. A range of bespoke interventions and therapies blend superbly into everyday routines. Specialist staff and therapists work alongside pupils in lessons and on a one-to-one basis. The high level of adult-to-pupil supervision successfully promotes pupils' self-regulation.

Pupils' attendance is high. The school goes above and beyond to help pupils to overcome any previous barriers and anxieties about education or wider school experiences. Staff maintain regular and supportive communication with families. Parents value what their children learn and appreciate the transformational difference the school makes. As one parent said, 'This school is a wonderful community full of lovely teachers and we are very grateful to be part of it.'

Careers advice is exceptionally well planned. Staff guide pupils impressively towards their future aspirations. A notable variety of well-considered work and enterprise opportunities are threaded through the curriculum at every opportunity. This inspirational curriculum extends into sixth form, where students are enabled to become increasingly independent as they start to prepare for adult life.

The school's personal development programme instils lifelong values in pupils, for example respect and equality. Pupils have plentiful opportunities to discuss current affairs. For instance, they demonstrate great maturity when debating topics such as consent, healthy relationships, peer pressure and social media. Pupils understand and respect different cultures and communities. They also learn about other religions and visit places of worship. Pupils develop their leadership skills by participating in a range of sporting events and performing at a musical festival. Pupils are extremely well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Governors are committed to making sure that all pupils go on to lead independent, confident and successful lives. They have robust oversight of the school's work. Staff work as a united team. They appreciate how the school prioritises their workload and well-being. It is a harmonious and a highly supportive place for staff to work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

When we have judged 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 March 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	110585
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10313340
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	210
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	34
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Matthew Watkins
Headteacher	Alison Rooney
Website	www.fds.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 October 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and communication needs. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- Pupils are placed at the school by Buckinghamshire local authority.
- Many pupils join the school at different points in their school life.
- This school is currently using one registered alternative provider and four unregistered alternative providers.
- 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

- 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 these subjects: early reading, mathematics, personal, social and health education, and creative arts. 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 held a wide range of meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders and teaching staff in the school. The lead inspector met with three governors including the chair. She spoke on the telephone with an officer from Buckinghamshire local authority and the headteacher of the virtual school. The lead inspector also spoke on the telephone with senior staff from two of the unregistered alternative provisions.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour during visits to classrooms, during breaktimes and as pupils moved around the school.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents expressed in Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents. Inspectors also considered the views of staff during meetings with them and through the staff survey.
- 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

Shazia Akram, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Martin Dyer

Ofsted Inspector

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