

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Amwell View School

Station Road, Stanstead Abbots, Ware, Hertfordshire, SG12 8EH

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Inspection dates:

17 and 18 April 2024

## **Outcome**

Amwell View School continues to be an outstanding school.

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

This school opens up the world to its pupils. Pupils make astonishing progress because staff are highly skilled. They deliver expertly bespoke curriculums according to pupils' needs. Staff's aim is to 'unlock cognitive potential' and they do this through a variety of means. Developing pupils' ability to communicate is at the heart of the school's work. They do this with tangible success.

Staff know pupils exceptionally well. There is no ceiling to the ambition they have for the pupils in their charge. During their time at school, pupils have many opportunities they may not ordinarily experience, such as rock climbing and horse riding. Some even develop the confidence to sing at the Royal Albert Hall. Post-16 students learn how to run the school's charity shop and garden for the local business community.

There is a highly positive learning atmosphere at the school. Staffs' use of gentle humour, coupled with boundless enthusiasm, develops trust where pupils want to 'have a go'. For example, steering their wheelchair through obstacles during a physical education (PE) lesson or floating on their back in the therapy pool. If a pupil is unsure and becomes anxious, staff adeptly manage behaviour. This means that pupils feel safe in this controlled environment.

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

The holistic development of pupils drives the meticulously planned curriculum. It provides pupils with the skills and knowledge they need to function and thrive in later life. Pupils learn essential communication, literacy and numeracy skills. Staff have a comprehensive understanding of each pupil's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They craft a highly personalised curriculum that is aspirational and matched carefully to pupils' education, health and care plan (EHC plan) targets as well as their communication plans.

Many staff are experts in their chosen specialist field. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties benefit from an innovative curriculum and specialist resources in the

sensory studio. Pupils express themselves through eye gaze technology and respond to sound and visual stimuli. Staff work closely with the school's team of therapists, including speech and language, so pupils develop physically and learn to communicate. In their teaching, staff effectively use the communication system and aids that suit the pupil. Teaching assistants use visual aids to help pupils understand how well they have completed an activity. Supportive liaison with parents ensures that the same communication routines are followed at home. Thus, enabling reinforcement through repetition. As a result, non-verbal pupils find their voice.

The school has a rich reading environment. Staff read to pupils daily. Pupils re-create their favourite books through means that are available to them. This may be through choosing texture and materials, pictures and words or through photography. Staff consistently follow the school's pre-phonics and pre-reading curriculums. This helps pupils to listen and respond. A few pupils progress to learning phonics. Where this is the case, books are matched to the sounds that pupils know.

Routines are exceptionally well embedded. This starts in Nursery and Reception where children learn to move from circle time to different play areas. They learn how to take turns and how to share toys. Pupils in key stage 1 put on their arm bands and swimming hats without fuss, sitting patiently to begin their swimming lessons. Pupils know exactly what staff expect of them. Staff watch behaviour closely. This helps inform a change in strategy or communication. This means that pupils get the help they need to enjoy their time at school. As a result, pupils attend well.

The school's personal development programme is incredibly well-considered. There is a sharp focus on helping pupils navigate their day-to-day lives, such as going to the dentist or getting their hair cut at the on-site salon. Pupils with physical disabilities learn to walk over bumpy and overgrown terrain in the school's outdoor area, The Dell. This helps prepare them for when they are older and attend the community classroom which is in the local village. Post-16 students learn important employability skills, such as customer service and food preparation. Students have careers input, including work experience.

Governors offer highly effective support and challenge to the school and have a secure understanding of their statutory responsibilities. Despite the many strengths of the school, everyone is firmly committed to continuous improvement. Staff feel looked after and appreciate the school's investment in their ongoing training. Staff are dedicated to their work. They provide an extensive amount of valuable advice and guidance to the wider education community.

Parents are effusive about the school, such as comparing their experience to, 'winning the lottery'. Many commented on how the provision has changed their child's life and theirs.

## **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 September 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>	117684
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10323659
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	170
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	17
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Local authority
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Philip Lancaster
<b>Headteacher</b>	Neil Ward
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.amwell.herts.sch.uk">www.amwell.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date(s) of previous inspection</b>	13 September 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with autism, severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- In April 2024, the school became the lead school for Delivering Special Provision Locally (DSPL) as part of a hub arrangement with Hertfordshire local authority.
- The current headteacher took over the full substantive role in March 2022. Prior to this he shared the role with the predecessor headteacher.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

## 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 met with the chair of the governing body, members of the governing body, the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, PE and personal, social and emotional education. For the latter, this included a consideration of the school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) provision. 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.
- 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.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's staff survey and Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments, as well as a letter.

### **Inspection team**

Liz Smith, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Ruth Brock

Ofsted Inspector

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