

Inspection of an outstanding school: St Giles' Spencer Academy

Hampshire Road, Chaddesden, Derby, Derbyshire, DE21 6BT

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 May 2024

Outcome

St Giles' Spencer Academy continues to be an outstanding school.

The principal of this school is Kim Smith. This school is part of Spencer Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Paul West, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Donna Kinderman, who is responsible for this school and 25 others.

What is it like to attend this school?

St Giles' Spencer Academy provides an exceptional education for its pupils and is ambitious for all who attend this caring school. Relationships between pupils and adults are kind and respectful.

At the heart of the school's work is the strong focus on communication and developing independence. Through effective communication, staff develop warm relationships with pupils based on high levels of trust. Pupils know staff will help them. As a result, pupils are happy and feel safe.

Staff have a profound understanding of pupils' unique and individual needs. Pupils learn to recognise when they need to regulate their behaviour through the careful support of staff. Staff help pupils to make the right choices. As a result, there is rarely any disruption to pupils' learning.

Staff have a strong commitment to ensuring that pupils receive highly aspirational learning. Expectations for their achievements are high, no matter what pathway they follow.

Pupils flourish socially and academically. There is a wide range of enrichment opportunities for pupils to get involved with. They particularly enjoy taking part in forest school, soft play and yoga. Pupils enjoy positions of responsibility, such as being school councillors and helping with snack time.

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

Pupils receive an ambitious curriculum. The school has designed learning pathways and

areas of learning that meet the complex needs of its pupils. This covers a broad range of subjects and well-planned enrichment opportunities, as well as therapeutic interventions. Pupils follow a highly personalised curriculum that is tailored closely to meet their individual needs. This helps all pupils, including those with profound and complex multiple needs, to learn exceptionally well.

Staff provide interesting tasks to motivate and engage pupils. These tasks extend pupils' learning. Adults provide many opportunities for pupils to repeat and therefore reinforce knowledge, so they know and remember more over time.

Staff know precisely the knowledge and skills they need to check pupils have remembered and can do. They use this assessment information accurately to check pupils' progression through the curriculum.

The school prioritises the development of pupils' communication skills, as well as their reading and language skills. Staff are well trained in the use of a wide range of communication methods and strategies. The school uses a total communication approach which means staff find and use the right combination of communication methods for each pupil. From Reception, children learn to use communication methods that support their independence. This enables pupils to ask and answer questions, and to convey their choices and emotions. Consequently, all pupils have a voice and they are listened to. Pupils enjoy structured sessions which use touch and music to create sensory communication between adults and pupils.

There is a highly effective programme of phonics for those who are at the early stages of reading. Pupils who are ready to learn phonics develop their early reading skills well and some learn to read fluently. Pupils enjoy books and sensory stories, as well as song.

Pupils' sensory needs are fully considered by staff. They use a range of activities designed by school staff and occupational therapists to promote regulation. These include sensory spaces, outdoor activities, sensory circuits and working with nature in the forest school. Skilled staff notice when a pupil might have increased anxiety. They step in and provide pupils with effective support. This helps pupils to control their emotions so they can return to their learning activities. Over time, pupils learn effective self-regulation strategies.

The curriculum is designed to help pupils learn about different faiths and festivals, such as Diwali, Eid and Christmas. Pupils are given many opportunities to explore their talents and interests. They enjoy cooking and taking part in a wide range of trips. For example, visits to Carsington Water, a garden centre and open farm, the cinema and museums.

Staff are proud and happy to work at this school. They speak highly of leaders' support for staff well-being and to manage their workload. Trustees and governors are passionate about the school and know the school well.

Leaders at all levels support staff to make a significant difference to the lives of pupils and their families. One parent told inspectors: 'St Giles' Academy is an amazing school for children with additional needs; without the effort and support the school provides and the

provisions they have in place for my child, they wouldn't be able to grow and develop in the way they have.'

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, St Giles' School, to be outstanding in December 2016.

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	147558
Local authority	Derby
Inspection number	10324212
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	147
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Donna Kinderman
CEO of the trust	Paul West
Principal	Kim Smith
Website	www.stgilesspencer.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected. St Giles' Spencer Academy converted to become an academy school in November 2019. When its predecessor school, St Giles' School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.

Information about this school

- St Giles' Spencer Academy is a special school for pupils aged 4 to 11 who have complex needs, including autistic spectrum disorder, moderate learning difficulty, severe learning difficulty and profound and multiple learning difficulty.
- This school is part of the Spencer Academies Trust. The school joined this trust in November 2019.
- The new principal took up her post in January 2024, and an additional senior vice principal joined the school at the start of April 2024.
- All pupils and students have an education, health and care plan. Places are commissioned by two different local authorities.
- Pupils access a pathway in school to meet their needs. The pathways include: the '2D

Curriculum: Early Discover and Early Develop' and the '3D Curriculum: Discover, Develop and Deepen'.

- This school operates on two sites. The Hampshire Road site, which is the main site, caters for early years (Reception), key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils where children typically have severe learning difficulties, profound needs and more complex sensory needs. Most of the pupils at this site are non-verbal. Pupils may also have other associated needs including complex physical disabilities, health or care needs. The Hive provision, on Sir Frank Whittle Road, caters for key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils who have moderate or severe learning needs, and other associated needs, such as autism spectrum conditions, speech and language and communication needs, and social, emotional, mental health needs.
- The school does not make use of any alternative providers.

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.
- 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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading and communication; mathematics; design and technology; and personal, social and health education (PSHE). For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work where available.
- To explore the wider curriculum, the lead inspector also discussed the curriculum in another subject with curriculum leaders and looked at pupils' work.
- The lead inspector met with staff from the trust's central team, including the director of inclusion, the director of primary education, and the director of quality and standards.
- Inspectors met with the principal, senior leaders and staff from curriculum learning areas.
- Inspectors met with pupils, both verbal and non-verbal, to discuss their views.
- Inspectors observed social times, including snack time and lunchtime.
- The lead inspector met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair of governors as well as the chair of trustees and the CEO of the trust.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation on the school website and documentation relating to the governance of the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents and records linking to attendance and

behaviour, as well as school improvement documentation.

- Inspectors considered the views of pupils, parents and staff through discussions and a consideration of their responses to the online surveys, including the free-text facility in Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Anne Maingay, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Jason Brooks

Ofsted Inspector

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