

Inspection of a good school: Saxon Hill Academy

Kings Hill Road, Lichfield, Staffordshire WS14 9DE

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 May 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might be outstanding if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Melanie Newbury. This school is part of the Shaw Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Jo Morgan, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Andrew Meehan.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school whose staff know their pupils inside and out. Pupils achieve well because they experience meaningful learning opportunities that are delivered skilfully by a team of expert staff. Teachers, support staff and health support assistants work together effectively to overcome barriers to learning so that pupils can thrive.

School leaders, supported by governors and the trust, want every pupil to be the best they can be. They are constantly looking for ways to improve the school even further. However, they never lose sight of putting pupils at the heart of their plans.

Pupils enjoy learning and engage in a wide range of activities. Wherever possible, staff encourage pupils to work independently. Where activities are adult led, there is a relentless focus on engaging pupils in the learning experience. Positive relationships permeate the school and pupils enjoy being with their friends. Staff spot any potential triggers that may cause pupils to become upset and step in quickly to offer reassurance.

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the school. They value the level of care provided by staff and are thrilled to see their children make so much progress. Many parents see the school as their lifeline.

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

The school's curriculum is mapped across four pathways. Within each pathway, the order of learning builds well from the early years to the sixth form. If required, pupils move fluidly within and across the different pathways to make learning more purposeful. There are lots of opportunities for pupils to revisit and deepen their learning due to the way the curriculum is designed.

The school pays serious attention to ensuring all pupils can communicate effectively. Means of communication are personalised to the needs of individual pupils. As a result, all pupils have a means of expressing their views, thoughts and ideas.

Teachers plan learning activities that are stimulating, purposeful and multi-sensory. Staff know their pupils well and match learning activities to their needs. Staff check that pupils have understood the learning and, if required, adapt activities to meet the needs of the pupils in their care.

The school has designed a pre-formal and formal phonics curriculum for pupils at the early stages of reading. The school has made adaptations to the phonics curriculum, so they can check non-verbal pupils' phonics knowledge accurately. This enables staff to identify any misconceptions, so extra support can be put into place if required. Pupils enjoy sharing books with adults. Those who follow the formal phonics programme use their phonics skills well to decode and blend unknown words.

The school is aware that the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) of pupils may change as they get older and there may be undiagnosed needs. As a result, the school works closely with a range of external agencies to ensure that pupils' needs are identified accurately over time. This supports the school to put the right help and support in place.

The school has a robust strategy in place to promote good attendance. They analyse attendance information closely to identify any patterns or trends. This enables them to put bespoke support in place for individual pupils and their families.

Pupils speak fondly of the staff, and they enjoy being with their friends. However, the main attraction is the therapy dog, who pupils adore. Pupils respect and celebrate difference. They say that everyone is welcome in their school. Pupils enjoy the responsibilities that are on offer in school, such as the school council and friendship 'buddies'. Pupils who hold these positions take their responsibilities seriously and they make a difference. Older pupils know how to spot signs that someone may be struggling with their mental health.

The school prioritises preparing pupils for adulthood from an early age. Pupils write shopping lists and visit local shops and cafes to buy items. They are encouraged to interact with members of the public and they get to use public transport. In addition, pupils are encouraged to pursue leisure interests and they enjoy taking part in class trips to local places of interest, such as the cathedral.

The school helps pupils to identify their future aspirations linked to their strengths and interests. The school then maps out a pathway that will support pupils to pursue these. Where appropriate, a package of work experience is arranged for older pupils. This includes working in the local garden centre, supporting the local food bank and working in the school's craft barn that is located on another site. The school supports students and their families well to identify possible post-19 options, including local colleges and social care provision.

Supported by the academy council, the multi-academy trust has a range of systems in place that keep them informed about the school's performance. As a result, they can challenge and support the school to provide the best possible life chances for the pupils.

Staff value the support they get from leaders and each other. They appreciate the fact that leaders are always at hand to provide extra help if required. Staff appreciate the training they receive, which supports them in their role.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 predecessor school, Saxon Hill School, to be good in September 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 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	142094
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10322876
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	133
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Andrew Meehan
Headteacher	Melanie Newbury
Website	www.saxonhillacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 October 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Saxon Hill Academy is an all-through special school.
- The school caters for pupils with physical disabilities, medical and complex learning needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is part of the Shaw Education Trust.
- The school has a nursery that admits two- and three-year olds.
- 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.
- The school does not use any 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 this into account in their evaluation.
- 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.
- The lead inspector met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, a representative of the board of trustees, five members of the academy council, including the chair, and the chief executive officer of the trust. He also held a telephone conversation with the head of the Virtual School.
- Inspectors held meetings with a range of leaders to discuss specialist provision, attendance and careers information.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and language, including early reading, physical development and personal, social, health and economic education. 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. An inspector also looked at the curriculum for early mathematics.
- The lead inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils formally and informally about their learning and experiences at school. A group of two pupils accompanied the lead inspector on a personal development learning walk around the school.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, and the free-text responses received during the inspection. The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation. This included the school's self-evaluation form, school policies, curriculum documents, SEND records, attendance records and minutes of meetings held by the academy council.

Inspection team

Wayne Simner, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lesley Yates

Ofsted Inspector

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