

# Inspection of a good school: St Bernard's School

Wood Lane, Louth, Lincolnshire LN11 8RS

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Inspection dates: 14 and 15 May 2024

## Outcome

St Bernard's continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Helen Harkness. This school is part of Inspire Connected Community Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Lea Mason, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Rhodes.

## What is it like to attend this school?

The school's bespoke approach to the curriculum means that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) thrive and achieve well. Many parents and carers have positive views. One parent, echoing the views of many, commented, 'My child attending St Bernard's has been transformational. They are happy and settled.'

The school's values of 'communication, community, and connection' are part of everyday life. Pupils with speech, language and communication needs are supported well. For example, the school uses signing, symbols and electronic aids to help meet pupils' needs. Pupils enjoy a range of community visits, including trips to the Spout Yard Café, Lincolnshire Showground, and the local town centre. Sixth-form students appreciate the overnight stays in Norfolk and London. These opportunities help pupils to connect with places that are different from those they usually experience.

Pupils benefit from an extensive offer of enrichment activities. A pupil, typical of many, commented, 'School is fun and there's plenty to do here.' For example, pupils can take part in handball, archery and Makaton clubs. Students in the sixth form are provided with high-quality work experience opportunities. They can mentor younger pupils as part of their childcare studies and work in the school kitchen as part of their catering course. Pupils are fully prepared for their next stages of education, training and employment.

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

Leaders, including those with responsibility for governance, have maintained a good standard of education, while skilfully overseeing a period of transition and change. This

has included successfully moving into a new school building and overseeing the recent merger of two local multi-academy trusts.

Pupils' education, health and care plans (EHC plans) are carefully considered by the school when designing an ambitious curriculum for pupils with diverse needs. Early communication, reading, mathematics and science have been prioritised. These subject curriculums are well thought through and enable pupils to build knowledge and skills over time. For example, in mathematics, pupils build their learning to tell the time and use money as part of work experience in a local café. However, some subject curriculums are not as ambitious. They do not set out the knowledge that pupils need to know over time. This can lead to unnecessary repetition of learning for some pupils.

The school has developed four bespoke curriculum pathways. This ensures that all pupils' ages and stages of learning are met very well. Assessment information is used well to ensure that pupils are accessing the right curriculum pathway. Adults check that pupils are learning the intended curriculum that is bespoke to individual needs. The school makes good use of assessment to ensure that pupils access the appropriate accredited pathways and qualifications, in line with individual stages of learning and development.

Teachers make learning relevant and purposeful. In early years, children begin to understand the world through play and continuous provision. They can use sand for measuring and pouring and explore transport through outdoor equipment and role play.

The school is firmly committed to ensuring that all pupils learn to read. It does not set a ceiling on what pupils can achieve over time. Pupils at the very early stages of communication, including in the early years, explore familiar sounds such as environmental sounds. Those pupils at the early stages of learning to read, including older pupils, are taught phonics well. Pupils use the sounds they know to read unfamiliar words. Pupils become confident and fluent readers. Adults ensure that storytelling is accessible to all pupils. For example, those at the early stages of learning can experience stories in different settings, including the sensory room. Pupils enjoy listening to adults read books to them and speak enthusiastically about 'Grandpa's Great Escape' and 'Winnie the Witch'.

Pupils behave well in school because their needs are very well met. The school uses a range of positive behaviour strategies. For example, alternative communication strategies are used to support dysregulated pupils to refocus and return to lessons quickly. Relationships between pupils and staff are extremely positive. However, despite the school's consistent efforts, too many pupils are not attending school as often as they should. This means that some pupils are not benefiting fully from the good standard of education on offer.

The school's work to enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is of a good quality. Pupils learn the importance of respecting others who are different from themselves. They enjoy learning about festivals around the world, exploring places of worship and undertaking charity fundraising, for example for Ukraine. The wider curriculum extends well beyond the academic and vocational offer. The school provides ample opportunities for pupils to debate and express their views about current affairs.

'Enrichment Fridays' enable pupils to take part in activities such as cooking, rugby and woodland-based interests.

Leaders, including those responsible for governance, know the school well. They know the school's strengths and what the school needs to do next. Staff are very proud to work at the school and feel valued by leaders. They recognise that leaders are mindful of their workload and well-being.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The school has not clearly identified the key substantive and disciplinary knowledge that pupils must learn over time in some subjects. As a result, these subject curriculums are not as ambitious and well sequenced as others. The school should ensure that all subject curriculums are equally ambitious, thus enabling pupils to build learning progressively over time.
- While leaders are taking steps to improve the attendance of pupils, too many pupils do not yet attend as well as they should. This means that they are not benefiting from the full education that is provided. The school should ensure that strategies to reduce absence change the attitudes and culture of attendance for these pupils over time, enabling all pupils to benefit from the school's good provision.

## **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, St Bernard's School, Louth, to be good in March 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 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>	142309
<b>Local authority</b>	Lincolnshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10313302
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<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>	101
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	21
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	David Rhodes
<b>CEO of trust</b>	Lea Mason
<b>Headteacher</b>	Helen Harkness
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.lwctrust.co.uk">www.lwctrust.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	11 July 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school became an academy in September 2015 and was part of the Lincolnshire Wolds Federation (LWF). On 1 May 2024, the LWF merged with a neighbouring multi-academy trust to form Inspire Connected Communities Trust.
- The school's senior leadership team consists of a headteacher, who took up post in September 2023, and an interim assistant headteacher, who took up post in May 2024.
- The school moved into a new building in September 2023.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. The school caters for pupils who have a range of SEND. These needs include: speech, language and communication; autism; profound and multiple learning difficulties; and social, emotional, and mental health needs.

- At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils in the nursery provision for 2- and 3-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 make use of 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 had 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 headteacher, the interim assistant headteacher, curriculum leaders, teachers and support staff.
- The lead inspector met trust leaders, including the CEO.
- The lead inspector met with the chairs of the governing body and the board of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early communication, reading, mathematics, and personal, social and health 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. They listened to pupils read.
- 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 reviewed a range of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation and development plans. Inspectors looked at a range of information regarding attendance and behaviour. They observed the behaviour of pupils in classrooms and at social times.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys for pupils and school staff. They reviewed parental responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments.

## Inspection team

Clive Lawrence, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Heather Hawkes	Ofsted Inspector

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