

Inspection of a good school: Cedars - Newcastle, Moorlands and Darwin Bases

High Street, Knutton, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire ST5 6BX

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 June 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 not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where staff work hard to give pupils a fresh start with their education. Many pupils arrive here having been excluded from their previous school or having been out of education for long periods of time. Staff get to know pupils well. They take the time to build warm and trusting relationships with pupils to help them re-engage with learning.

Pupils' behaviour is highly variable. Staff do not consistently challenge pupils' derogatory language when it is used. In addition, some pupils wander between classrooms or linger in corridors; they do not always follow the instructions of staff. All of this combined can lead to some lessons being disrupted.

The curriculum offers a range of subjects to study across key stages 3 and 4. However, in some subjects, the key knowledge that pupils need to learn and remember is not set out clearly. This hinders their progress.

Friday activities help broaden pupils' experiences beyond the classroom. Pupils have the opportunity to go caving, climbing and walking with alpacas. There are also inter-school sports tournaments in basketball, football and netball, which take place each term. Pupils enjoy visiting a local farm to take part in bushcraft activities, such as making fires and building dens.

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

The school is in the process of reviewing the curriculum. Pupils in key stage 4 work towards achieving GCSE and functional skills qualifications. Alongside this, pupils can also achieve a variety of other unit awards. In some subjects, the school has not set out the building blocks of knowledge that pupils need to know to complete more complex tasks.

This does not help pupils to secure the relevant prior knowledge they need and to build on what they already know. As a result, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable or achieve well in their examinations.

There is variability in how the curriculum is taught. In some lessons, teachers use their subject knowledge and resources effectively to help pupils learn. In English, for example, pupils are provided with a 'scaffold' to show them how to structure their responses to examination questions. However, teachers do not consistently use assessment strategies to check pupils' learning. This leads to pupils being given work that is not well matched to their ability and gaps in knowledge not being addressed swiftly.

The school has started to implement a reading strategy. All pupils are assessed on entry to establish their strengths and weaknesses in reading. This information is used to help inform what support pupils need with their reading. However, some of this work is still at an early stage, and the school is not carefully monitoring and tracking the impact of its reading interventions.

The school has clear processes in place to identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This begins at induction, where leaders gather information from previous schools and conduct their own baseline tests. Individual support plans are reviewed regularly to check progress against targets that have been set. However, the school is not checking whether the strategies outlined in pupil support plans are being implemented consistently well in lessons.

The school regularly collects feedback from staff about pupils' behaviour. This information is used to inform discussions at the end of each day about each pupil and to provide the local authority with information about the progress they are making. However, the school does not have a clear and coherent approach to help pupils learn about ways to improve their conduct. As a result, some pupils continue to demonstrate negative attitudes towards school and disrupt the learning of others.

The school monitors and tracks attendance closely. While attendance for some pupils remains low, the school has put in place several strategies to help encourage and support pupils to attend more regularly. This is having a positive impact. The school works closely with the local authority to ensure that any cases that need to be escalated further are done so in a timely way.

The school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum sets out the broad topics that are to be taught over the year. This includes learning about relationships and sex education. However, the PSHE curriculum does not clearly define how learning builds from key stage 3 into key stage 4 and how pupils deepen their knowledge and understanding of key topics.

Pupils in key stage 4 are provided with careers advice and guidance. This includes a discussion with a careers adviser and talks from local college providers. However, the school has not developed a careers programme that builds from Year 8. It is not using the Gatsby benchmarks to help develop and improve its careers provision.

Staff are positive about the school and the support they receive from leaders regarding their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Sometimes, the school's online safeguarding logs are not updated in a timely way to reflect the actions that leaders are taking to keep children safe. Safeguarding records do not always show the chronological actions being taken by the school after a concern is raised.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's electronic safeguarding logs are not always updated regularly enough. This means that, in some instances, it is unclear when actions have been taken and how pupils receive help and support in a timely way. The school should ensure that all safeguarding records clearly show the chronological steps being taken to keep pupils safe from harm.
- The school has not set out a coherent strategy to teach pupils how to improve their behaviour. This means that some pupils continue to display negative attitudes to their learning, use derogatory language and do not follow staff's instructions consistently. The school should ensure it puts in place a behaviour strategy to help pupils develop a more positive attitude towards school, staff and their studies.
- In some subjects, the school has not identified and set out the smaller blocks of knowledge pupils need to secure before completing more complex tasks. This means that some pupils struggle to connect their learning together and build on what they already know. The school should ensure that the curriculum in each subject sets out the precise knowledge and skills pupils need to remember over time.
- Teachers are not using assessment strategies consistently well to check what pupils know and remember. This means that gaps in pupils' knowledge persist, and misconceptions and errors do not get spotted quickly. The school should ensure that teachers use assessment methods effectively to help pupils make better progress in their learning.
- The school's PSHE curriculum and careers programme are not as well structured as they should be. Pupils are not building, from key stage 3, a depth of understanding of important PSHE topics. In addition, the school is not using the Gatsby benchmarks effectively to help develop and improve its careers provision. The school should revise its PSHE curriculum and careers programme to help strengthen the way pupils' personal development is catered for.

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 school to be good in November 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	131652
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10322802
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	58
Appropriate authority	Management committee
Chair of management committee	Phill Evans
Headteacher	Pam Clulow
Website	www.cedarsnewcastle.staffs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 February 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Cedars Short Stay School provides education for pupils in the Newcastle District or Moorlands District of Staffordshire who have been permanently excluded from mainstream school.
- The school has a separate Darwin base that provides education for children who reside at the child and adolescent mental health services tier 4 inpatient unit at the University Hospital North Staffordshire.
- The school uses three registered and one unregistered alternative provisions.
- The school does not meet 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 met with the chair and two other members of the management committee. Meetings were also held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally to pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and art and design. 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 also looked at the PSHE curriculum to check how this was planned and taught.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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. These included information about behaviour, attendance, the school curriculum and improvement planning. The school website was also checked.
- Inspectors observed informal times of the day to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and free-text comments. They also considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.
- Inspectors also visited the school's Darwin base.

Inspection team

Mark Howes, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lesley Yates

Ofsted Inspector

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