

Inspection of Five Acre Wood School

Boughton Lane, Maidstone, Kent ME15 9QF

Inspection dates: 2 and 3 July 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Early years provision

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

An ethos of 'one wood, many trees' underpins the inclusive practice that sees pupils receive a rich and fulfilling education at Five Acre Wood. Many pupils have complex medical and educational needs. They each learn a curriculum tailored to meet their needs and aspirations, following one of the various learning approaches that the school offers. An unrelenting culture of ambition underpins them all.

Planning for the future starts as soon as children join the school in Nursery. Throughout their education, pupils learn very well. They learn to communicate and interact with people and the world around them. When ready, pupils receive thoughtful support to move on to further education and employment. This school is focused on giving pupils the very best start in life.

Pupils are supported by staff who understand the various ways in which pupils communicate. If pupils struggle to manage their feelings, they receive effective support to refocus and settle. Pupils behave well because they know exactly what is expected of them. School routines are clear and consistent, meaning classrooms are calm and orderly places where pupils can learn. Staff praise pupils for their hard work and when they meet their personal achievements. Pupils learn to be proud of themselves and consistently strive to achieve their very best.

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

The number of pupils joining this unique school has increased significantly in the past three years. Leaders have responded very well to ensure pupils continue to receive a high quality of education and care. High-quality leadership on each of the five school sites ensures that pupils' best interests are prioritised. Leaders continually seek meaningful opportunities to engage with parents and carers to ensure they feel fully involved in their child's education. Staff joining the school receive thorough training to ensure they know how to meet the needs of pupils. This is enhanced by further guidance and support from an extensive team of specialist medical and therapy staff.

When children first join the school, staff work closely with parents and professionals. The specific support each pupil requires is swiftly identified. Expert teachers and specialist staff use their collective experience to design a curriculum that helps children to thrive. In early years, children are exposed to learning that helps them to make sense of the world around them. Staff help children to communicate using a range of images, symbols and signs. Children settle quickly into school life as their needs are fully understood and met.

A relentless focus on developing pupils' communication skills weaves through each of the six curriculum pathways. When it is appropriate, staff support pupils to read following a phonics approach. These pupils receive expert teaching that enables them to read with increasing fluency and confidence. Across the school, pupils enjoy

a rich range of stories, songs and rhymes, providing further opportunity to practise Makaton and body signing.

The school is highly aspirational for each and every pupil. A meticulously designed curriculum sets out the knowledge and skills that pupils need to be ready for the next stage of education. Outcomes from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans are carefully broken down into smaller targets. Teachers skilfully plan learning that enables pupils to achieve these targets while acquiring new knowledge and skills. Staff regularly check that pupils are achieving all that they can. They adapt approaches to help pupils practise important skills. Consequently, pupils achieve very well.

All pupils are treated with utmost dignity and respect. A designated team works with families to provide highly effective support that helps pupils regularly attend school. Staff receive expert guidance so they can support pupils' therapeutic needs. When needed, pupils receive swift and effective support to help to manage their emotions. In-school plans clearly identify the precise strategies staff follow to help pupils feel calm. Therapeutic support is effective in reducing pupils' worries to help them learn and flourish.

Careers education is thoughtfully designed to raise pupils' aspirations for the future. It starts with younger pupils learning to take responsibility for themselves and others. This includes looking after the animals in the school farm. A new on-site school café has been established giving older pupils employable skills, while they serve younger pupils who practise ordering food. Careers education is particularly impactful for those students on post-16 pathways. Pupils study an extensive range of suitable accreditations, such as functional English and mathematics and vocational courses. This is further enhanced by students attending meaningful work experience and charity work, such as working in a local farm. Partnerships with local colleges and specialist placements are strong. Staff help students and their families make suitable ambitious plans when they are ready to leave school.

The school goes above and beyond to provide for pupils' personal development. Particular attention goes into ensuring disadvantaged pupils benefit from the opportunities on offer. Pupils learn essential life skills, such as learning to swim in the school pool or using public transport through role play on the school bus. Particular attention is given to develop pupils' musical and artistic talents. Pupils host their own 'Woodstock Festival', art shows and release their own music singles at Christmas time. Every aspect of pupils' wider development is exceptionally well planned and delivered.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	119055
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10354185
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
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	757
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	93
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Margaret Fisher
Headteacher	Peggy Murphy
Website	www.fiveacrewood.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	28 March 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Five Acre Wood School is a very large special school supporting pupils who have profound, severe and complex needs. The pupils who attend have a very wide range of learning and medical needs. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school runs one primary, three secondary and one post-16 satellite provisions for pupils. Two of these provisions are located in nearby mainstream schools. The school also runs observation and assessment provision for nursery-aged children on the Boughton Lane site.
- The school does not use any alternative providers of education for any pupils.
- The school is part of Kent Special Educational Needs Trust, which is a cooperative Foundation Trust of 26 schools across Kent.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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 senior leaders, staff and pupils on each of the school sites. The lead inspector also met with the representatives from the governing body. The lead inspector also met with a representative of the local authority. The lead inspector met with representatives of the NHS nursing team that supports the school and provides staff training.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and interaction, early reading, mathematics, physical and sensory development and art and design. They discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, teachers and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. Two inspectors also listened to pupils read. Inspectors also looked at other aspects of the school's wider curriculum.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including the free-text comments. They also took account of the responses to the confidential staff survey and gathered the views of both staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- 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 and scrutinised a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' plans for improving the school, minutes of governors' meetings and records of attendance and behaviour incidents.

Inspection team

Michelle Payne, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Gavin Thomas	His Majesty's Inspector
James Stuart	His Majesty's Inspector
Harry Ingham	His Majesty's Inspector

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