

Inspection of an outstanding school: White Spire School

Rickley Lane, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK3 6EW

Inspection dates:

9 and 10 July 2024

Outcome

White Spire School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are flourishing at this school. They achieve exceptionally well and their behaviour is exemplary. Relationships between staff and pupils are highly positive. This helps pupils to feel safe and very well supported. Pupils are respectful and kind to others. They enjoy one another's company and get on well together.

There is high ambition for every pupil. This is reflected in the palpable learning culture that permeates the school. Staff instil pupils with confidence, aspiration and a belief that they can succeed. As a result, pupils work hard and do so without fear of failure, knowing that staff are there to support them. Pupils are full of pride about their achievements. They are also immensely proud to be part of the 'White Spire Family'.

Pupils benefit from a diverse range of experiences that help to prepare them for adulthood. For example, they enjoy visits to shops and the local community and travel on public transport. Older pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme which includes overnight expeditions. Students in the sixth form gain valuable workplace skills by helping to run a community café, 'The Daily Grind'. They also benefit from a residential visit where they experience outdoor, adventurous activities.

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

The school's vision statement, 'Through Learning to Independence', sums up the school's determination to prepare pupils for adulthood. This is founded on a strong moral purpose and belief that all pupils, no matter their needs, can succeed and achieve. These fundamental principles underpin the curriculum and teaching at this school. The success of this is seen in pupils' excellent achievement. This includes the qualifications they achieve and their successful pathways into further education or employment.

The curriculum is ambitious and coherently sequenced. It is shaped around modified objectives drawn from the national curriculum. Staff successfully integrate pupils'

outcomes from their education, health and care plans (EHC plan), creating a bespoke curriculum that meets pupils' needs exceptionally well. Pupils learn a broad range of subjects. Priority is given to English, mathematics, cooking and personal, social and health education (PSHE). As pupils move into key stage 4, the curriculum is increasingly aligned with different qualification pathways. Skills for life are woven through this, ensuring that pupils acquire the knowledge they need for independent living.

The school has an unswerving focus on literacy and reading. Pupils at an early stage of learning to read receive regular phonics teaching. Along with frequent practice, this successfully builds pupils' knowledge and fluency. Good-quality texts form the backbone of the English curriculum. Adapted versions of classic texts enable older pupils to access reading books appropriate to their age and maturity. Their growing ability to read unlocks a whole new world. It enables pupils to read texts to support their learning in different subjects and in daily life.

Staff are knowledgeable and highly skilled. They adapt their approach and means of communication to cater for pupils' needs. For example, they use Makaton signing and visual symbols. Staff break down learning so it is manageable for pupils. Frequent repetition is built into the teaching sequence. Underlying this is teachers' very strong knowledge of pupils and their learning pathways. This starts with a suite of assessments when pupils join the school, and thereafter, staff's regular progress checks.

The impact of this school on many pupils' lives has been transformational. Pupils attend well because they want to be here and feel that they belong. They behave superbly well. Pupils open doors for others and shake the hands of visitors, keen to tell them about what they are learning. The school is a motivating, inclusive environment where everyone is welcomed and where friendships are forged. One parent summed this up, 'All through primary school our son was well loved but did not have a single person he could call a friend, and now he has a whole school full of them.'

The school's work to prepare pupils for adulthood is commendable. Staff teach pupils important life skills, including how to prepare simple meals and important hygiene practices. Pupils learn about relationships and sensitive topics, such as consent. They learn how to behave and keep safe in different social settings. Pupils receive excellent careers guidance about the options open to them when they leave school. Termly careers weeks and meaningful work experience give pupils valuable insights into the world of work and further education.

Staff are fully committed to working at the school and feel as valued as the pupils. Leaders and governors are very considerate of staff's well-being, ensuring that workload is reflected in enhanced time for preparing lessons.

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 school to be outstanding in January 2019.

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	110575
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10321785
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	167
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	31
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Neil Griffiths
Headteacher	Finlay Douglas
Website	www.whitespireschool.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	22 and 23 January 2019 under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- White Spire School is a community special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Many pupils have additional needs associated with speech, language and communication needs, physical and/or sensory needs or autism. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school currently uses one unregistered alternative provision.
- The headteacher is also the interim executive headteacher of The Redway School in Milton Keynes.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils in Reception or Year 1, and very few pupils in Year 2. Most pupils join the school in Years 6 or 7.
- 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.

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 carried out deep dives in: early reading, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the curriculum and sampled pupils' work in other subjects.
- During the inspection, it was not possible to visit sixth-form lessons or speak to students in the sixth form. This is because students were attending a residential visit. However, inspectors considered the curriculum for sixth-form students and sampled their work.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other senior leaders.
- The lead inspector met with two members of the governing body, including the chair. She also held a telephone discussion with a representative from the local authority.
- 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 took account of pupils' views during meetings with them and spoke with them during visits to lessons and at other times of the day.
- Inspectors took account of the view of parents through their responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text comments. The lead inspector spoke with some parents at the start of the second day of the inspection. Inspectors considered staff's views during meetings with them and through their responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Sue Cox, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Giles Osborne

Ofsted Inspector

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