

Inspection of Breakspeare School

Gallows Hill Lane, Abbots Langley, Hertfordshire WD5 0BU

Inspection dates:	1 and 2 October 2024
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Insufficient evidence
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils receive exceptional care. They trust that any discomfort or unease will be swiftly spotted and solved. This is because pupils' assigned staff are deeply attuned to their wants and needs. This safeguards pupils' dignity and ensures a nurturing, secure environment.

Established routines and respectful relationships maintain high standards of behaviour. The daily greeting, for example, teaches pupils to use their communication strategy to politely acknowledge those around them.

Getting out into the community helps pupils develop their independence. For example, they go bowling, dine in cafés or visit the library. These visits also improve their writing skills. Recently, pupils wrote a letter to a local business. They successfully requested a wheelchair ramp be installed, so all their friends could come inside. This shows how the school supports pupils to want the best for themselves and others.

Students in the sixth form thrive. The carefully crafted curriculum uncovers their talents and interests. For example, they tend to gardens on and off site, inspiring some to study horticulture at college. Some students work with a local gardening business. Success stories like these are common throughout the school. Being in an environment that brings out the best in them boosts pupils' confidence and pride in their achievements.

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

Since the last inspection, leaders have produced a precise curriculum. It outlines what pupils should learn from the early years through to sixth form. The school's child-centred approach allows for careful pupil grouping. It means pupils access the lessons and facilities that best meet their needs. Staff sensibly align long-term aims from education, health, and care (EHC) plans with short-term curriculum targets. This ensures purposeful daily learning, evident in pupils' workbooks and discussions. By sixth form, students confidently complete tailored qualifications. These showcase their knowledge and skills, whether writing by hand or using assistive technology.

The school uses evidence-informed approaches to teach pupils communication and reading. Staff choose suitable methods based on their understanding of each pupils' needs and their EHC plan. They regularly create opportunities for pupils to practise and reinforce their learning. For instance, the weekly signing assembly teaches pupils to use gestures to express their thoughts and feelings. Fostering a love for both classic and modern stories is a top priority. Staff ignite pupils' imagination with sensory storytelling that captivates them. Carefully chosen lighting, sounds, and textured fabrics keep pupils engaged and immersed.

Some pupils have medical needs that cause frequent absences. The school advocates for these pupils with external agencies. The aim is to ensure pupils receive the necessary care and support to return to school. Leaders' supportive work with parents and carers has significantly improved some pupils' attendance.

The school is calm and purposeful. Leaders recruit and train staff who understand the challenges pupils face. Staff guide pupils to become independent and respectful individuals. Staff know when to push pupils out of their comfort zone. This broadens their sensory experiences. They also know when to step in and offer support if a pupil becomes dysregulated. This empathy is evident in how pupils interact with each other. For example, they happily dine together in the hall. They also share their friends' likes and dislikes to show their interest in those around them.

The school offers an exceptional personal development programme. Pupils develop responsibility and respect by caring for animals. Lunchtime clubs, assemblies, and whole-school events nurture pupils' social skills. Cross-school collaborations, including art and sports festivals, expand these opportunities. The school also prioritises pupils' physical and mental health. The offer includes effective physical therapy and counselling for those pupils needing it.

The careers programme is embedded in the curriculum and school life. Younger pupils learn personal responsibility by tidying their belongings. Older pupils complete job applications for roles within the school. These include delivering milk, laundry service or maintaining the library. The school has links with local businesses, such as a charity shop. These links allow the school to arrange work experience for pupils who can manage it. Staff work closely with pupils and parents to plan future pathways. This ensures smooth transitions to college or specialised residential care.

Leaders, including governors, aim high and think deeply. They know how to challenge and bring out the best in themselves and others. Staff appreciate well-being arrangements, such as the buddy system. It ensures new staff receive the support they need to hit the ground running. Feeling valued means staff welcome feedback and training. The behaviour support team, for example, encourage openness and trust. So, staff feel comfortable seeking advice to support pupils' behaviour safely and well. The strong focus on professional development ensures a highly skilled workforce.

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 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	117681
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10323657
Type of school	Special
School category	Community 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	139
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Emma Gritten
Headteacher	Merja Paakkonen
Website	www.breakspeare.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	7 and 21 March 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties or severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties. These needs include autistic spectrum disorder, hearing impairment and/or visual impairment. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school is part of the Sunflower Federation which comprises this school and Meadow Wood School. The two schools work under one headteacher, senior leadership team and governing body. This union has been in place since May 2017.
- Since the last inspection, the school has expanded. It is scheduled to take ownership of a new building on a new site, with an expected opening date in September 2026. Until then, there is satellite provision at Holywell Primary School in Watford, and some pupils are being educated at Meadow Wood School in Bushey.

- The school serves nursery and Reception-age children. However, at the time of inspection, there were not enough children enrolled in the early years to justify a separate judgment grade.
- The school reasonably interprets the Gatsby Benchmarks to 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.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the headteacher, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers, three governors, a representative from the Hertfordshire virtual school and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: 'My Communication' (covering communication and language, and early reading), 'My Thinking' (including mathematics), and 'Myself' (covering personal, social, and health education, as well as relationships, sex, and health education). For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and education support staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work alongside their EHC plan.
- The lead inspector also discussed the curriculum in these subjects: 'My Community' (covering geography, history and religious education) and 'My Writing' (covering English).
- 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 school documentation, including the school improvement plan, self-evaluation form, minutes from meetings of the governing body and evaluative reports from the local authority.

- Inspectors reviewed responses to surveys and any e-mailed or hand-delivered correspondence regarding the school. These included 39 responses to the staff survey and 18 responses with 14 free-text responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also held separate discussions with pupils and staff. To ensure pupils felt comfortable and able to communicate, leaders and/or staff were present for inspectors' discussions with pupils.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Cindy Impey

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024