

# Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Hednesford Valley High School

Stanley Road, Hednesford, Staffordshire WS12 4JS

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Inspection dates:

8 and 9 October 2024

## **Outcome**

Hednesford Valley High School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

This school helps pupils to be 'ready to learn' in school and 'ready for life' after school. Recent changes across the school have improved the quality of education that pupils experience. These high expectations are having a positive impact on how well pupils achieve across a range of subjects.

Strong, professional relationships between staff and pupils are tangible. Pupils value the level of care they receive, which helps them to feel safe. The school knows the pupils well and quickly spots any signs that a pupil may be anxious or upset. Where required, the school steps in quickly to support pupils so they can re-engage with their learning at the earliest opportunity.

Pupils enjoy school and are rarely absent. They display good manners, rush to hold doors open for staff, and welcome visitors to the school. Pupils show respect to each other, and they are genuinely pleased when their classmates achieve success. In most instances, pupils listen well and focus on their work in lessons. At breaktimes, pupils enjoy being with their friends, playing football, or simply relaxing by themselves.

Parents and carers comment that staff go over and above what they would expect to support their children.

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

When a pupil joins the school, the school uses information in the education, health and care (EHC) plan, alongside baseline checks, to determine the curriculum pathway that a pupil will follow. As a result, pupils experience a learning journey that is most suitable for their needs. There are occasions when the school identifies undiagnosed needs. In

these instances, the school quickly seeks an accurate diagnosis so that it can put suitable support in place.

Across the two curriculum pathways, the school has mapped out the knowledge and skills that pupils will learn within and across year groups. Consequently, new learning builds on what pupils have learned in the past. Pupils work towards a range of relevant qualifications and are well prepared for the next stage in their education.

Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to support pupils with their learning. Staff have secure subject knowledge and explain new learning clearly. Lessons are structured around a 'recall-routine-recap' model, which gives pupils lots of opportunities to revisit and reinforce previously taught learning. However, at times, the choice of learning activity is not well matched to pupils' needs. In these instances, the activity can either be too difficult, or too easy, which limits how well pupils access their learning and achieve in the lesson.

The school recognises the importance of reading. The school has systems in place to support any pupils who are at the early stages of reading. This is achieved through accurate identification, well-structured phonics sessions and focused interventions for specific pupils. As a result, pupils with weaker reading skills get better at reading.

Sixth-form students experience a comprehensive study programme. They pursue a range of academic and vocational qualifications with great success. Preparation for adulthood, including community projects, has a high priority. Sport, cultural experiences, including theatre visits and a planned residential, enrich the curriculum further. Students are well prepared for their next steps, which may include college and supported internships.

The school prioritises preparing pupils for adulthood from an early age. Pupils learn about personal hygiene, online safety, managing finances, food preparation and much more. The careers, information, education and guidance curriculum is well developed. Sixth-form students benefit from three work experience placements, which they enjoy. Currently, the school is looking into work-related learning for pupils with more complex needs. Pupils are well prepared for life after when they leave the school.

Pupils are proud of the leadership opportunities they hold in school. These include being a school council member or an anti-bullying ambassador. Pupils value the wide range of after-school clubs, which are changed throughout the year. They have a developing understanding of healthy eating and regular exercise. In addition, older pupils know about the different types of families that exist in their community, including children who are in care.

Governors are right behind the school and support the ongoing efforts to further improve the school. The school has started to make checks on how well the curriculum is being delivered. However, these checks need to be more focused on specific aspects of teaching and learning.

Staff feel part of a team and they value the support they get from each other. They appreciate the visibility of leaders and the inclusion team, who are at hand to offer help and support where required. Leaders are considerate of staff's well-being and have introduced changes to reduce workload.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

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

- In some instances, the school is not using checks on pupils' learning effectively to inform the choice of learning activities. As a result, learning activities can either be too easy, or too difficult, which limits how well pupils achieve. The school should routinely use checks on pupils' learning to inform the choice of learning activities so they are more sharply matched to the needs of the pupils.
- The checks that the school makes on the curriculum are not sufficiently focused on how well the curriculum is being delivered by teachers. As a result, the school is not accurately identifying some areas of curriculum implementation that it needs to develop further. The school should ensure that checks on the curriculum are sufficiently focused so that any areas of inconsistency are identified and appropriate support can be put into place.

## **Background**

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 for overall effectiveness in September 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

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| <b>Unique reference number</b>                    | 124508   |
| <b>Local authority</b>                            | Staffordshire  |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                          | 10343888   |
| <b>Type of school</b>                             | Special  |
| <b>School category</b>                            | Community special  |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                        | 11 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>        | 190  |
| <b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b> | 42   |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                      | The governing body   |
| <b>Chair of governing body</b>                    | Clive Cole   |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                                | Stephen Stokes   |
| <b>Website</b>                                    | <a href="http://www.hvh.staffs.sch.uk">www.hvh.staffs.sch.uk</a> |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                | 6 March 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005          |

## Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with a range of SEND needs. This includes moderate learning difficulties, autism, severe learning difficulties, social, emotional and mental health needs, and speech, language and communication needs. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school's sixth form is located at Cannock Chase High School.
- 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 use any alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 this into account in their evaluation.
- 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.
- The lead inspector met with the headteacher, the two deputy headteachers, five members of the governing body, including the chair of governors, and the headteacher of the secondary school that houses the sixth-form provision.
- Inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning, looked at samples of pupils' work and spoke with teachers.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils formally and informally about their learning and experiences at school. A group of pupils accompanied an inspector on a personal development learning walk around the school.
- Inspectors considered parents views through the responses to Ofsted Parent View, and the free-text responses received during the inspection. The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation. This included the school's self-evaluation form, school development plan, school policies, curriculum documents, SEND records, attendance records and minutes of meetings held by the governing body.

## Inspection team

Wayne Simner, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Sarahjane Cuncannon Edwards

Ofsted Inspector

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