

Inspection of a good school: Bracken Hill School

Chartwell Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire NG17 7HZ

Inspection dates:

24 and 25 November 2021

Outcome

Bracken Hill School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending this welcoming school. Staff are very caring and supportive. Parents and carers appreciate the help staff give them and their children. Staff understand pupils' individual needs well. Pupils say that they feel safe and are happy at the school. One parent summed up the views of many when they stated, 'Fears are overcome, and joy is to be had at this school.'

Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. All activities are completed together, which creates a 'family atmosphere'. Pupils know staff will look after them and help them to learn. Staff are very skilled in meeting the pupils' complex needs. Leaders have high expectations that pupils 'will embrace opportunities and be successful in the modern world'. They ensure that the school supports all pupils to make progress towards this aim.

Pupils' behaviour is good. They are considerate of each other's needs and engage very well with their learning. They have positive attitudes to their education. Lessons are not affected by disruption since staff support pupils to understand and manage their emotions. Pupils are certain that if bullying happens, staff will deal with it quickly and effectively.

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

Pupils follow a curriculum pathway that is appropriate to their particular needs.

Pupils following the 'pioneer' and 'adventurer' pathways enjoy studying English and mathematics. The curriculums for these subjects are well structured and help pupils to become secure in their knowledge and understanding. Pupils engage well with the interesting project work teachers plan for these pathways. These projects cover the other subjects pupils study. In some of these subjects, the curriculums are not always planned as well as they could be. Leaders do not always identify precisely enough the key knowledge that pupils need to learn through studying these projects. Teachers sometimes

do not take into account what pupils have learned before. Occasionally, pupils do not learn things they need to know, or repeat work that focuses on knowledge they have already learned.

Young pupils on the 'explorer' pathway experience a curriculum that is very well matched to their needs. Staff use suitable techniques to help develop these pupils' ability to concentrate and focus. Children enjoy exploring their environment and engaging with it in their own ways. They do not mind adults joining in with them to help them learn. Children respond positively to adults' requests.

The 'explorer' pathway is planned well to support older pupils with complex needs. The sensory input for these pupils helps them to stay calm and engage well with their learning. Staff respond quickly when pupils become anxious. They help pupils to regulate their emotions. Pupils show remarkable levels of control as a result. For instance, during a music lesson, pupils quietly shook and banged their instruments. Some pupils progress extremely well on this pathway and move on to study a more structured programme of subjects.

Staff are skilled at helping pupils improve their language and communication. Pupils use individual strategies effectively to communicate what they need to with others. Staff promote a love of reading by making sure that pupils read each day. Some young pupils learn to read successfully using their phonics knowledge. Others are suitably supported through a whole-word reading system. Staff use an effective reading intervention to help some pupils to read with confidence. However, the books that some pupils read do not always match their knowledge of phonics closely enough.

Staff plan activities that interest the pupils and help them to learn. Consistent routines based on words such as 'now' and 'next' mean that pupils feel secure during lessons. Staff regularly check on pupils' progress and communicate this to parents. However, they do not always give pupils the guidance they need to help them to improve their understanding through the work they complete.

Pupils enjoy high-quality personal development. They enjoy activities such as swimming lessons, horse-riding and learning in the local woodland. Some have the opportunity to be involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Pupils receive good-quality careers advice and guidance. Older pupils benefit from lessons that prepare them for the world of work and adult life. They develop important teamworking skills and learn to look after themselves. Some attend college courses, such as in construction. Others develop catering skills by preparing hot meals for families in the community. This prepares them well for their next steps. Pupils are taught about other cultures, religions and moral issues. This prepares them for life in modern Britain.

Staff are proud to work at the school. The school leaders are appreciated by parents and staff. Staff value the support leaders give them. Staff appreciate the opportunities they have to develop as professionals. They say that leaders care about their well-being and are considerate of their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff understand their responsibility to use their knowledge of the pupils to identify quickly any concerns about pupils' welfare. They know to report any such concerns immediately. The close relationship they have with families enables staff to provide comprehensive support. Leaders go above and beyond to secure the support that families need. Those responsible for leading safeguarding are quick to act, involving other agencies when it is appropriate. They keep accurate records and have appropriate procedures in place to manage any allegations. Pupils are taught about how to stay safe, including when online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum is not yet sufficiently well planned and sequenced in some subjects. In these subjects, leaders have not identified well enough the knowledge that pupils need to learn. They have not ensured that these subjects' curriculum is sufficiently ambitious. However, it is clear that leaders have already taken action to plan next year's curriculum to resolve these concerns. They have also planned to train staff in how to deliver the curriculum. For this reason, the transitional arrangements have been applied.
- Some books that pupils are reading do not match their knowledge of phonics closely enough. This slows their progress towards becoming better readers. Leaders must make sure that all pupils read books that match the sounds they know.

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 a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 2012.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	122961
Local authority	Nottinghamshire County Council
Inspection number	10200110
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	154
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Phil Lakin
Headteacher	Catherine Askham
Website	www.brackenhill.notts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 September 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school provides education to pupils aged four to 19 with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. These include: specific learning difficulty; moderate learning difficulty; severe learning difficulty; profound and multiple learning difficulty; speech, language and communication needs; autism spectrum disorder; multi-sensory impairment; physical disability; visual impairment; and hearing impairment.
- The school has a separate building that is used by post-16 students.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans, spoke to leaders and visited lessons in the 'explorers' pathway and looked at the provision for communication and interaction.
- Inspectors spoke to the leaders of the early years provision and visited the early years foundation stage/key stage 1 classroom.
- Inspectors heard children in different year groups read books.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the governing body.
- Inspectors considered a wide variety of school documents, including the school development plan.
- Inspectors took note of the responses received on Parent View and considered the results of the Ofsted staff questionnaire. Inspectors also looked at the responses to the adapted pupil questionnaire that the school had produced.
- To judge the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors read the school's relevant policies, scrutinised the single central record, checked the school's procedures for the safe recruitment of staff and met with the designated lead for safeguarding. Inspectors also spoke with staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Dave Gilkerson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Rachel Tordoff

Her Majesty's Inspector

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