Inspection of an outstanding school: Hope School

Kelvin Grove, Marus Bridge, Wigan, Greater Manchester WN3 6SP

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 April 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

All pupils at this school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Most have an education, health and care plan.

Pupils value the calm and welcoming atmosphere that permeates their school. Staff greet pupils warmly as they arrive each morning. Staff ensure that they are aware of any additional support that pupils might need by working closely with parents and carers.

Pupils behave well. Those who find this difficult due to their SEND benefit from effective support in learning how to regulate their behaviour.

Pupils are happy at school. They told inspectors that they look forward to seeing their friends. Pupils said that they enjoy their lessons and the varied activities that their teachers arrange for them. Pupils explained that their favourite activities include 'golden time', being outside on the playground, taking part in fitness activities and baking.

Pupils are proud of their accomplishments. They are also quick to celebrate when one of their classmates achieves an important milestone.

The school expects all pupils to try their best and to achieve as well as they can. However, pupils experience variable success in achieving this aspiration. This is because the school does not make sure that pupils understand, remember and apply all aspects of their learning consistently well.

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

The school has devised a rich and broad curriculum that captures pupils' interests well. It has carefully considered pupils' varying starting points in the design of this curriculum.

The school has identified the broad topics that pupils should learn as they progress from the provision for two-year-olds to the sixth form. It is beginning to refine the curriculum to ensure that pupils can successfully build their knowledge from their different starting points. However, while this process is underway, teachers are not sufficiently clear about the key knowledge that pupils require in readiness for subsequent learning. Sometimes, the learning activities that teachers select do not support pupils to learn as well as they should, including in reading. This hinders some pupils from building securely on what they already know.

In the main, teachers adhere to most of the school's agreed strategies for checking how well pupils are learning the curriculum. Nonetheless, at times, some teachers assume that pupils have secured learning when this is not the case. When this happens, some pupils develop misconceptions or gaps in their knowledge. From time to time, some pupils are not fully prepared for their next stage of learning.

Communication and language have a high priority in the school's curriculum. Pupils enjoy and respond with enthusiasm to the well-loved songs, stories and rhymes that their teachers share with them. These, and similar activities, prepare pupils well to learn to read. Pupils also begin to explore a range of high-quality texts as soon as they join the school, including in the provision for two-year-olds. As well as helping pupils to build up their reading knowledge and understanding of language, this also enhances their understanding of the wider world.

The school uses a suitable programme to help pupils to learn how to use phonics to read words, when they are developmentally ready. However, the school does not make sure that teachers consistently follow the agreed programme. At times, the reading books and activities that teachers provide do not support pupils in practising and embedding the sounds that they have learned. Consequently, some pupils do not build up secure reading knowledge. Although some pupils read with fluency and accuracy, other pupils do not make the same gains in reading. This sometimes hinders their learning in the rest of the curriculum.

Teachers identify pupils' SEND accurately. This helps them to support pupils to grow in independence and confidence. However, some pupils do not learn as successfully as they could due to a lack of clarity in curriculum content and inconsistencies in how it is delivered.

The school's provision for pupils' wider development is of a high quality. Teachers ensure that pupils focus on their strengths, rather than the difficulties that they face as a result of their SEND. Pupils carry out a wide range of roles and responsibilities within their own classes and around the school. Pupils were keen to explain some of these to inspectors, such as preparing their own lunch or being involved in running a café for the local community. Students in the sixth form access a wide range of work-related activity. This helps them to make informed choices about their next stage of employment, training or education.

Pupils' attendance at school is well below pupils' attendance nationally, most commonly due to their complex medical needs. However, the school's processes for identifying when

pupils' attendance is becoming a cause for concern lack rigour. This is also true for records of pupils' behaviour. Although pupils' behaviour rarely disturbs learning, the school focuses on isolated incidents involving pupils, rather than identifying emerging patterns of behaviour. The lack of accurate and up-to-date information about pupils' attendance and behaviour impacts on the school's ability to provide effective additional support for some pupils when this is needed.

Governors work closely with the school. They check that any decisions are made in pupils' best interests. They also make sure that staff's workload is not compromised when improvements are planned.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not finalised the essential knowledge that pupils should learn within the broad topics of the curriculum. This means that, at times, teachers do not select the most appropriate activities to support pupils to successfully build their knowledge, including in reading. The school should ensure that teachers are clear about the essential knowledge that pupils should learn and when this content should be taught.
- Sometimes, teachers do not check that pupils have the necessary prior knowledge before moving on to new learning. Some pupils do not learn as well as they could as a result. The school should ensure that teachers are equipped to make sure that gaps in pupils' knowledge are identified and addressed quickly and well.
- The school does not identify patterns and trends in pupils' absences or in behavioural incidents as swiftly as it could. This makes it more difficult for the school to provide timely support for those pupils who do not behave or attend as well as they should. The school should make effective use of the information that it has about pupils' attendance and behaviour to bring about necessary improvements.

Background

When we have judged a school to be 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in June 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

Unique reference number	106543
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10294253
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	227
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Christine Slonker
Headteacher	Susan Lucas
Website	www.hope.wigan.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 September 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils at this school have complex SEND. They have a range of primary needs including autistic spectrum disorder, multi-sensory impairment, severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The school's capacity has increased since the previous inspection. The school now operates on two sites. The sixth form is housed at Montrose Avenue, Wigan WN5 9XN.
- The school uses four unregistered alternative providers for pupils.
- A new chair of governors has been appointed since the previous inspection.

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. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- 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 spoke with the headteacher and other leaders in the school. An inspector also spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- An inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, including communication; personal, social and emotional development; and understanding the world. They spoke with the leaders of these areas of the curriculum. They also visited lessons, looked at examples of pupils' work, held discussions with teachers and talked with pupils.
- Inspectors also spoke with pupils about their learning in other subjects. They looked at samples of pupils' work from across the curriculum.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at breaktimes and lunchtimes. They observed pupils' behaviour as they moved around the school. An inspector also scrutinised leaders' records of pupils' behaviour.
- An inspector visited the school's breakfast club.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their experiences at school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. They also considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.
- An inspector observed the arrivals procedure for pupils using arranged transport. She also spoke with parents and carers as they brought their children to school.

Inspection team

Claire Cropper, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Claire Hollister	Ofsted Inspector

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