

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Hazel Oak School

Hazel Oak Road, Shirley, Solihull, West Midlands B90 2AZ

Inspection dates:

10 and 11 December 2024

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that aspects of the school's work may not be as strong as at the time of the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a welcoming school. Pupils contribute well to this ethos. Whether it is a simple greeting or pupils keen to share their experiences, they make visitors feel welcome. Positive relationships exist between staff and pupils. This helps pupils to feel safe in school. Most pupils attend school regularly. They feel confident to talk to adults if they have a concern. Pupils are clear that any concerns will be resolved quickly.

The school is developing their curriculum to meet pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Some pupils experience variability in the quality of education and provision at the school. There are aspects of the curriculum that help pupils to build learning and prepare them well for life beyond school. However, pupils' learning across the curriculum is uneven as, in some pathways, their needs are not met as well as they should be.

The school has clear expectations for pupils' behaviour. Consequently, behaviour is typically positive. When pupils require additional support, staff are child-centred in their approaches and work quickly to intervene and offer the support that is needed.

Most parents are happy with the school's provision. However, the school recognises there is more to do to ensure all pupils flourish and attain the best outcomes.

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

Since the previous inspection, there has been a period of instability at the school. This is because the pupil cohort has changed over time. The school now supports a range of complex needs. There has also been turnover of staff. This period of instability is settling. The school is continuing to make necessary changes. This includes developing the curriculum offer and provision in school to ensure that this meets the needs of all pupils.

The school has identified the areas of priority for school development. Plans are underway and the school is working to implement necessary changes. Several improvements to the school's quality of education are in place. For example, staff are receiving regular and high-quality training. The school identifies pupils needs accurately. This helps staff to know pupils well and inspires and motivates them to engage with learning. This contributes to a positive environment where routines for learning are becoming established.

The curriculum is delivered through three pathways to suit pupils' individual needs. From early years, children start on the 'life ready' pathway. Children have opportunities to engage in all areas of learning while exploring their own interests and passions. There is a strong focus on building relationships with children. This helps them to settle and join in with learning. The school is still developing this pathway and the impact is not yet fully evident.

For pupils on the 'life ready' pathway, there is variability in the implementation of the curriculum. The activities that pupils are given do not link well enough to their stage of learning. As a result, pupils enjoy a range of experiences, but their learning does not build well enough.

The school uses an established phonics programme effectively. This is delivered to pupils who are ready to learn phonics. Staff have received regular training and support to develop their subject expertise. As a result, pupils are supported in learning phonics and applying these skills to reading and writing.

A whole-school communication system is not yet embedded to support pupils with the most complex needs. This means that some pupils are not consistently learning and developing the foundation skills of communication and language. This impacts their ability to communicate and have a voice in school.

As pupils move into the secondary phase, there are two further curriculum pathways. These provide a suitable curriculum where pupils work towards appropriate end points. These pathways are called 'employment ready' and 'college ready'. As pupils move into these pathways, the curriculum is well sequenced. Consequently, as pupils reach the upper school, they gain the important knowledge and skills they need to succeed and achieve well. The school has selected appropriate vocational accreditations. These meet the needs of pupils and prepare them for meaningful employment or further education.

Most pupils attend well, but persistent absence is high for some. Where appropriate, the school places pupils on attendance action plans. They work collaboratively with families and professionals to support pupils and increase attendance.

The school provides opportunities and experiences beyond the academic curriculum. The school recognises there is more to be done to ensure there are wider opportunities for pupils to take part in clubs and activities beyond the classroom. Pupils learn the right things to keep themselves safe and understand about the wider world. Some pupils take on extra roles and responsibilities. For example, pupils in the upper school run a weekly kitchen where they take orders, cook and deliver food to staff. They have received appropriate training to do this. They talk with passion and enthusiasm about their learning and the life skills they are developing.

Governors know the school well. They provide effective and consistent support and challenge for the school. Staff feel well supported by leaders. Leaders are considerate of staff's workload and well-being. Staff say that they enjoy working at the school and feel valued.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum is not developed sufficiently in some subject areas and pathways. The school has not yet identified the essential component knowledge a skills they want pupils to learn and in what order. This means that pupils are not building their knowledge or skills over time well enough. The school should ensure that they clearly identify the specific knowledge and skills they want pupils to learn and remember in all areas of the curriculum.
- Staff do not always implement the curriculum well enough to support pupils' learning. Learning activities provide pupils with some experiences but do not always build effectively on what pupils know and can do. This limits pupils' learning. The school should ensure that the work teachers give to pupils precisely identifies the important knowledge and skills and enables them to build on their learning.
- Communication systems for pupils with the most complex communication needs are not yet securely embedded across the school. Sometimes, staff do not apply their training to ensure that pupils access and use the systems to get their 'voice' across. Leaders need to ensure that all pupils have access to and are consistently enabled and encouraged to use the most appropriate communication system.

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 outstanding 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in June 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	104130
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	10343787
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	201
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	25
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Andy Sharp
Headteacher	Andrew Simms
Website	www.hazel-oak.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 June 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan. The school caters for pupils with a broad range of SEND, including autism, speech, language and communication needs, moderate learning difficulty or severe learning difficulties.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- 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 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 that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, heard pupils read, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher and staff.
- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body and the school improvement partner.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered key documentation, including the school development plan and governors' minutes.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. Inspectors met with school leaders to discuss and review how they respond to behaviour incidents and pupils' attendance.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff and pupil surveys. They considered the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text comments. An inspector also spoke to parents on the morning of the first day of the inspection.

Inspection team

Gemma Mann, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Pete Hines OBE	Ofsted Inspector
Richard Winzor	Ofsted Inspector

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