

Inspection of a good school: Briarwood School

Briar Way, Fishponds, Bristol BS16 4EA

Inspection dates:

24 and 25 May 2023

Outcome

Briarwood School continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Briarwood is a very special school. Each pupil has their own learning journey to help them make the best possible progress in the curriculum and their education, health and care plan objectives. Leaders are determined to give every pupil the skills and knowledge to prepare them well for adulthood. The curriculum has been redesigned to achieve this. Teachers have high expectations. They expect pupils to develop good communication skills, including learning to read. Teachers make learning relate to pupils' real-life experiences. Pupils find this an interesting way to learn.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They behave exceptionally well. There is very little bullying. Teachers help pupils understand better ways to relate to others when bullying does occur. Staff and governors help pupils feel safe. Pupils concentrate closely on their work, using practical resources and a wide range of communication aids. Pupils work well with their classmates. Pupils have strong relationships with teaching staff. Teaching assistants only give help when it is needed. Pupils learn to do more for themselves when they are ready for this.

The three school sites cater for different age groups. Each has its own distinct character, matched to the different needs of pupils as they grow older.

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

The executive headteacher and her leadership team provide very strong leadership. They have significantly improved the quality of education since the previous inspection. Learning is planned in three pathways. These are Acorn, Woodland and Forest. Each pathway has been designed for the particular learning needs of the different groups of pupils.

In each pathway, the curriculum includes a broad range of academic and life skill subjects. The content of each subject has been carefully selected to ensure that it is meaningful and relevant to pupils. Teachers use the detailed subject handbooks leaders have created to ensure that teaching covers the exact subject content pupils need in the right order. All pupils have a personalised learning programme. Staff assess astutely what pupils know and can do and the progress they make over time. Staff are skilful in assessing the amount of support pupils require to complete their learning. They encourage pupils to become more independent.

There is a consistent approach to teaching across the school. Pupils have lots of opportunities to practise new learning. Teachers model what they want pupils to learn. Teachers find fun and engaging ways to keep pupils interested. Pupils learn new sounds, and how different sounds blend together in phonics. They look at these sounds in words and in stories. They also learn to write these words. Pupils learn specific body movements and gestures to accompany this learning. They also sing songs to practise what they have learned. Pupils enjoy reading books that are well matched to the new sounds they have learned. Pupils make exceptionally good progress in their reading.

Post-16 students practise using money in mathematics. They use their number skills to work out what different coins add up to. This work is linked to their Duke of Edinburgh awards. Evidence is also gathered for a portfolio that will lead to a qualification. Students can explain what they are learning. Their work records demonstrate they are progressing well through the mathematics curriculum. Students have lots of opportunities to experience the world of work. Work placements are organised in school and with local employers.

The early years foundation stage leader uses her knowledge of the mainstream curriculum alongside the school's expertise in special educational needs and/or disabilities to create a highly effective curriculum for the youngest pupils. Pupils develop their communication skills well. They enjoy learning through sensory experiences.

The personal development curriculum is included within all subjects. Pupils learn about life in modern Britain and citizenship. They take part in a variety of activities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. The school hosts an annual music festival. Every pupil is encouraged to take part. Pupils are filmed and photographed taking part in the curriculum. Parents can see these via the internet. This helps parents know what their child has been learning.

Staff are extremely well trained and skilled at meeting the special needs of pupils. Pupils at the Nexus provision have all found it hard to learn in their previous schools due to their very challenging behaviour. Leaders ensure that staff have the expertise to keep these pupils safe and engaged in a curriculum that meets their specific needs. Leaders provide a high level of support to this team. Staff report how well leaders care for their well-being. Leaders ensure that staff have enough time to complete their work.

Parents who spoke to an inspector were extremely positively about the school. They all said how much their child enjoyed school, and how well they have progressed in their

communication skills. One typical comment from a parent was that school staff felt like family members because they were so supportive.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Recruitment processes are very well organised and managed. Leaders and governors regularly check that these meet government requirements. New staff and governors take part in a thorough induction training when they start at the school. Staff training is comprehensive. Leaders provided frequent updates to keep staff aware of local or national issues and check staff understanding overtly.

Staff know what to do if they have any concerns. Leaders are meticulous in their approach to reviewing safeguarding records. They quickly identify any trends or patterns. This information is used to inform staff training. Teachers may introduce new learning for pupils as a result.

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 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in June 2017.

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](#)' 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	109410
Local authority	Bristol City
Inspection number	10256796
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	163
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	28
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Deborah Smith
Executive Headteacher	Nicolle Deighton
Website	www.briarwoodschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	1 December 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a special school for pupils between the ages of 3 and 19 years. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. The school caters for pupils with profound and multiple, and severe learning difficulties, and those with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been changes to the leadership team. There is a new executive headteacher.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provider.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher and other senior leaders.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff. They also considered views expressed in the staff survey.
- The lead inspector met with the chair and vice chair of the governing body.
- The lead inspector had a phone conversation with the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics and what the schools call the 'Myself curriculum'. The deep dives included visiting a range of lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking with leaders, teachers and pupils.
- In making their judgements, inspectors considered the views of parents through a range of sources, including the responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Parent View. They also looked at the responses to the pupil and staff surveys.
- Inspectors checked the single central record and reviewed a wide range of documents and records relating to safeguarding.
- The lead inspector visited the Nexus provision.

Inspection team

Andy Lole, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Paul Smith

Ofsted Inspector

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