

Inspection of an outstanding school: Merstone School

Windward Way, Smith's Wood, Birmingham, West Midlands B36 0UE

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 September 2023

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?

Parents, staff and pupils all describe Merstone School as like a family. Pupils are looked after and learn well.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Staff know them well. The school has very high expectations for pupils. They have put a new curriculum in place so that these expectations are met. The school builds positive and effective relationships with pupils' families. Parents attend workshops and coffee mornings, learn how to use their child's communication aids and work with the family support team if they need help.

Pupils are supported exceptionally well. Behaviour is very well managed and pupils are taught to identify and manage their emotions well. Pupils learn about positive relationships and how to keep healthy in an age-appropriate way. This prepares pupils well for adulthood. The school understands that pupils may need additional help to manage puberty. It provides exceptional teaching, care and support to make sure that pupils learn about positive relationships and how to keep safe.

Pupils know they are appreciated and valued. They are supported to have a voice. Pupils are encouraged to express their opinions, and these views are listened to by staff. The school council makes suggestions to improve the school. Governors and the headteacher consider these suggestions carefully.

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

The headteacher joined the school in 2022 and quickly identified the aspects of the school's work that needed to improve. As a result, the curriculum has been redesigned into pathways that better match pupils' needs. The school knows its pupils incredibly well. This helps leaders to meticulously design subject curriculums that precisely meet the

needs of pupils. The curriculum is well planned and well sequenced. The school has identified the important things that pupils need to know, to experience and to be able to do. As a result of this careful planning, pupils in all pathways have a curriculum that is expertly planned to match their needs.

Teachers plan learning that is based on pupils' starting points. In most lessons, pupils receive high-quality support based on their precise next step in learning. In some lessons, however, the curriculum is not as well implemented. Activities are not as well chosen, and pupils do not receive the exact help that they need. This limits the progress that some pupils make.

Communication is the foundation of the curriculum. In nursery and early years, staff work from children's starting points to identify and teach them to use communication systems and aids that allow them to express their wants and needs effectively. Throughout the school, teachers carefully adapt the communication curriculum to meet the needs of the pupils in their classes. As a result, pupils learn to communicate with increasing proficiency.

Pupils at the early stages of reading are taught using an appropriate phonics curriculum. Pupils learn to recognise and blend sounds when they are able. Teachers make sure that pupils who read fluently understand what they are reading. Other pupils experience reading through 'story massage' sessions, sensory stories and hearing rhymes and songs. As a result, pupils enjoy engaging with reading.

Pupils are very well prepared for their next steps. Almost from their first day at school, the school is planning the skills and knowledge pupils will need to be able to flourish in the community. Pupils participate in many trips and visits. Pupils go on trips to the farm and local places of worship as part of the curriculum. They go to the theatre, cinema, soft play and bowling to introduce them to activities they may enjoy. Visitors to the school teach pupils about fire safety and road safety. A comprehensive careers programme teaches pupils about jobs and courses they can do. Sixth-form students are well informed and prepared for their next steps. The school's focus on preparing pupils for adulthood helps pupils to move on to their next steps with confidence.

Governors know the school well. They are thoughtful and systematic in making improvements to the school. The headteacher is determined that all pupils will experience the best education. The school has recently extended the leadership team to build capacity across the school. However, some aspects of the school's work are not monitored closely enough, and this slows the improvements that need to be made.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The new curriculum is not embedded consistently well across the school. This means that, at times, pupils do not make the progress that they could. The school should make sure that, in all lessons, the curriculum is implemented in the way they intend.
- The school has not made sure that all aspects of its work are monitored well enough. This means that the school cannot identify all areas for improvement and act quickly when needed. The school should make sure that all leaders understand their roles and responsibilities in order that they can maintain an effective oversight of their work.

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 third ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in May 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	104133
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	10257050
Type of school	All-through special
School category	Maintained
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	171
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Antoinette Fisher
Headteacher	Donna Luck (Executive Headteacher)
Website	www.merstone.solihull.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 October 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The executive headteacher joined the school in September 2022.
- The school caters for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties and pupils with complex autism.
- The school has provision for two-year-olds in its nursery. The nursery is sited just outside the school campus in a separate building.
- The school does not use 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 judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher and other senior leaders, other leaders, governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in: communication and interaction; physical development; and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors discussed the school's approach to early reading and visited some phonics lessons.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects and visited some lessons across the curriculum.
- Inspectors visited the nursery provision.
- 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 reviewed a range of school documentation relating to the work of the school.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders and staff about the wider work of the school.
- Inspectors took into account the views of parents, including reviewing the responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors reviewed the staff survey.

Inspection team

Claire Price, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Melanie Callaghan-Lewis

Ofsted Inspector

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