

Inspection of an outstanding school: Dawn House School

Helmsley Road, Rainworth, Nr Mansfield, Nottinghamshire NG21 0DQ

Inspection dates: 27 to 29 June 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. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending this caring and supportive school. Parents and carers say that their children are safe and happy at the school. Many say that the care their children receive is exceptional. One parent reflected the views of others when they said, 'My son has flourished and become a happy, confident learner that is gaining independence.'

Leaders and staff want the very best for their pupils. Pupils live up to the high expectations leaders have of them. They show care, respect and thoughtfulness to each other, the staff and visitors. Pupils engage very well with their learning. They have positive attitudes to their education. They are always trying their hardest.

Staff know the pupils well. Relationships are very positive. Pupils know staff will support them to learn. Teachers, therapists and support staff are very skilled in meeting pupils' complex needs.

Pupils' personal development is excellent. They enjoy the many enrichment activities they can choose from, such as 'dance club', hair and beauty sessions and fishing.

Although pupils are supported to achieve well, leaders have not ensured consistency in the quality of the support given to those pupils who require it to help them to learn to read fluently.

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

Leaders have developed suitable 'pathways' to meet the varied and complex needs of the pupils that attend the school. There is a well-developed system that assesses pupils' starting points when they join the school. This allows leaders to place pupils in either the 'CHIMES pathway' or in a group in the main school that best supports their learning.

Teachers use these assessments to plan the next steps that challenge pupils to learn and develop further.

The curriculum delivery enables pupils to build on previous learning experiences. In most subjects, teachers know precisely what each pupil needs to learn. Teachers adapt their teaching to ensure that all pupils understand what they are expected to know and remember. Teachers use questions to check what pupils know. They deal with any misconceptions pupils may have before moving on to introduce new learning.

Leaders are currently reviewing how they best develop pupils' ability to read. There is a stepped approach to help pupils understand sounds and link them to letters. This then builds to developing early reading using a suitable phonics scheme. However, not all staff that help pupils with their reading have been fully trained. This has led to some inconsistencies in the ways pupils are supported with their reading. The assessment of pupils' reading ability does not precisely identify what pupils can or cannot read. This has led to some pupils reading books that are too easy for them. Some pupils are not moved on to become more accurate readers as soon as possible. Regular literacy sessions help pupils develop their understanding and love of reading. Some of these sessions are more effective than others.

Leaders have focused on providing experiences that will have the greatest impact on pupils. This is most clearly seen in the excellent Chimes provision. The bespoke programmes and the high levels of support pupils receive ensure that their complex needs are very well met. External providers offer excellent opportunities for therapeutic work and outdoor learning for pupils to develop their interaction, communication and physical health further. However, leaders have not integrated all these aspects of pupils' provision so they contribute to the outcomes in their education, health and care plans (EHC plan).

Students in the sixth form benefit from carefully planned activities that interest them and help them to learn. They have access to a wide range of work experience opportunities, both on the school site and in the community. They also attend part-time college courses that develop their vocational skills and interests.

Leaders ensure that pupils' learning is not limited to the classroom. They have arranged many different visits that enrich the curriculum, including, for example, to local places of historical interest. There have also been theatre events and residential trips. There are a range of clubs available for pupils. Many have enjoyed learning how to ride a bicycle at school. The 'preparation for adult life passport' ensures that older pupils engage in activities that develop life skills, such as shopping and being safe in the community. These activities, alongside a comprehensive careers and personal, social, health and economic education programme, ensure that pupils are well equipped for life in modern Britain.

The school is well led. Staff say that leaders care about their well-being. They appreciate the recent efforts leaders have made to reduce their workload. Many staff are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture in the school. Staff and those responsible for governance receive high-quality safeguarding training. Staff use this training well to identify quickly any potential issues. They understand their responsibility to report any concern.

Leaders keep accurate records. They use what they know about the pupils and their families to provide comprehensive support for them. They are quick to act, involving other agencies when needed. They have appropriate procedures in place to manage any allegations.

Pupils learn about how to stay safe in the community, at school and when online in an age-appropriate way.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not ensured there is a clear and coordinated approach to developing reading and literacy skills. Not all staff that help pupils with reading have been trained to use the school's phonics-based programmes. Assessment of reading does not clearly identify what sounds pupils can and cannot read. Literacy lessons vary in quality. As a result, some pupils are not helped as effectively as they should be in becoming accurate and fluent readers. Leaders need to ensure that reading assessments and the support provided by staff enable pupils to become accurate, fluent and confident readers as soon as they are able.
- Leaders have not fully integrated all aspects of the pupils' provision. Some therapy and aspects of the provision delivered by external providers remain as stand-alone activities. This limits staff's ability to use these rich learning experiences as evidence towards the achievement of targets that are outlined in pupils' EHC plans. Leaders need to ensure that all activity that makes up the timetable for pupils is fully integrated into pupils' provision and precisely links to clear and measurable targets in their EHC plans.

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 March 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](#)' 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	122956
Social care unique reference number	SC008761
Local authority	Nottinghamshire County Council
Inspection number	10268978
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	80
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	7
Number of boarders on roll	8
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Susan Gregory (Chair of Education Committee)
Principal	Jenny McConnell
Website	www.dawnhouseschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Dawn House School is a day and residential school that provides education to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities aged five to 19 who have complex speech, language and communication needs. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism. All pupils have EHC plans. The school employs teams of therapists as well as education staff to support pupils.
- The school is part of the Speech and Language UK communication charity.
- The school uses the services of two unregistered alternative provisions for animal-based therapy sessions.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the residential provision.
- Inspectors met with the principal, other senior leaders, curriculum leaders, the head of therapy and assessment and a range of staff.
- The lead inspector met remotely with the chair of the education board and the chair and another member of the school advisory board.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading and literacy, mathematics, information and communication technology and the 'CHIMES pathway'. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector also observed pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also visited a range of lessons, including those in the outdoor learning area and looked at pupils' work from different subjects.
- The lead inspector visited one of the alternative provisions that deliver equine therapy.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at other times around school.
- Inspectors considered a wide variety of school documents, including the school self-evaluation and school development plan.
- Inspectors took note of the responses received on Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and considered the results of the staff and pupil surveys. The lead inspector met with small groups of pupils to gather their views.
- To judge the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector read the school's relevant policies, scrutinised the single central record, checked the school's procedures for the safer recruitment of staff and met with the safeguarding team. The inspectors also spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding.

Inspection team

Dave Gilkerson, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Chris Davies

His Majesty's Inspector

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