

Inspection of an outstanding school: Wren Spinney Community School

Westover Road, Off Westhill Drive, Kettering, Northamptonshire NN15 7LB

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 February 2022

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders have ensured that Wren Spinney School is a safe and caring environment for pupils with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Parents and carers support the school. Those who responded to the survey believe that their child is happy and safe. They say that the nurture and support that staff provide meet pupils' needs.

Communication between school staff and parents is good. Parents are regularly updated on their child's progress. Most parents would recommend the school.

Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive. There is a sense of teamwork as pupils and staff enjoy completing activities together. Staff know the pupils well. They ensure that they understand and meet the pupils' complex needs. Pupils know that staff will look after them and help them to learn.

Staff support pupils to communicate their needs in a variety of ways. They understand that some pupils may exhibit a range of behaviours associated with their additional needs. Staff respond well to occasions when pupils behave in ways that are not typical for them. Staff know that this behaviour may be caused by anxiety or distress, and so provide pupils with the necessary support. This support helps to ensure that bullying is incredibly rare.

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

Leaders have reviewed the curriculum and recently implemented three curriculum pathways. They have designed these to meet pupils' particular needs. However, leaders have not identified for each pathway what pupils will learn and how they will learn it.

They have not given sufficient thought to what pupils need to learn to prepare them for their next steps, including for those who continue in the school's sixth form.

The curriculums for subjects in the 'structured' and 'collaborative' pathways are not well organised. Leaders have not identified the important knowledge that pupils need to know and remember, and when they will learn it. This limits how well pupils develop their understanding in these subjects over time. For example, in mathematics, pupils begin to learn skills such as how to use money before they have developed the necessary basic knowledge of number. In the 'sensory' pathway, leaders have not given sufficient thought to what experiences pupils will encounter that will help them engage with learning.

Students in the sixth form enjoy a well-structured personal progress programme. They study functional skills, learn about employment and prepare for independent living. This helps to make them ready for their adult lives.

Staff use a variety of ways to introduce pupils to books and stories. Pupils enjoy stories that include objects that they can touch and play with as the teacher reads to them. However, staff have not been trained to use a consistent approach to the teaching of learning to read. As a result, not all staff have the knowledge they need to support pupils effectively who are at the early stages of learning how to read.

Leaders have ensured that supporting pupils to communicate is a high priority. They are developing a more structured approach to the teaching of communication skills. The recent staff training is beginning to improve the way in which pupils can communicate their needs. This approach is in its early stages of development.

Pupils benefit from clear and simple routines. Staff encourage pupils to focus on what is happening in the classroom. They support pupils to manage their behaviour well. Most pupils pay attention and join in with lessons because of the consistent efforts of the staff.

Pupils' personal development is strong. The opportunities available encourage pupils to engage in new experiences. Activities such as 'sensory circuits' are linked to targets in pupils' education, health and care plans. Some pupils enjoy horse riding and exploring allotments and gardens. Animals brought into the school help pupils understand more about living things. Pupils have explored cultural and religious events, such as Diwali and Christmas. As a result, they understand more about the world.

Trust leaders have not maintained the standards achieved in the past. However, recently appointed leaders are aware of the improvements needed. Leaders realise that this will create an extra workload for staff. However, many staff feel that leaders are mindful of their workload and well-being. Many staff enjoy working at the school.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspectors agreed that the teaching of the curriculum pathways and of reading may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff understand their responsibility to use their knowledge of the pupils to identify quickly any safeguarding concerns. They know to report any such concerns immediately. The close relationship they have with families and the services that the local area provides enables staff to provide comprehensive support. Those responsible for leading safeguarding are quick to act, involving other agencies when it is appropriate. They keep accurate records and have appropriate procedures in place to manage any allegations. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including when they are out in the local community.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not given sufficient thought to the knowledge and skills they want pupils to learn and when in each pathway. This limits opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding securely. Leaders need to ensure that teachers know what they should teach and when in each pathway, so that pupils develop their understanding sequentially over time.
- Leaders have not ensured that there is a consistent approach to the teaching of reading. Not all staff have the knowledge that they need to teach pupils to learn to read. As a result, pupils who are at an early stage of learning to read do not become confident readers as quickly as they should. Leaders should ensure that all staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach pupils to learn to read effectively.
- Leaders have not yet put fully in place a comprehensive approach that builds pupils' communication skills. This limits some pupils' progress in their ability to communicate. Leaders need to ensure that there is a clear approach to teaching communication in place that all staff understand and use.

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 a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Wren Spinney Community Special 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	144684
Local authority	North Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10210924
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	79
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	14
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Linda Saunders
Headteacher	Joshua Gershwin-Williams
Website	www.wrenspinney.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Wren Spinney Community School is a special school for up to 80 pupils aged 11 to 18 who have complex needs, including learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorder, visual impairment and multi-sensory impairment.
- Pupils study one of three pathways, depending on their needs. These are the 'sensory', 'structured' and 'collaborative' pathways.
- The school is a member of the Creating Tomorrow multi-academy trust.
- The school has significantly increased in size since the inspection of the predecessor school in 2014.
- There have been significant recent changes to the school leadership. The current headteacher was appointed in October 2021.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

- The school became an academy in September 2017. When its predecessor school, Wren Spinney Community Special School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.

Information about this inspection

This was the first routine inspection the school had 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.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading and communication, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, met with some pupils to consider their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about other areas of the school's provision.
- Inspectors visited the sixth-form provision.
- Inspectors heard pupils read books and visited phonics lessons and whole-class reading sessions.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the local governing body and of the multi-academy trust, including the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors considered a wide variety of school documents, including the school improvement plan.
- Inspectors took note of the responses received on Parent View. They considered the results of the Ofsted staff and pupil questionnaires. Pupils also communicated through adapted pupil surveys with support from staff.
- To judge the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors considered the relevant policies, scrutinised the single central record, checked the school's procedures for the safe recruitment of staff, met with the designated safeguarding lead, and spoke with staff and parents.

Inspection team

Dave Gilkerson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Caroline Oliver

Ofsted Inspector

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