

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The Pines Special School

Marsh Hill, Birmingham, West Midlands B23 7EY

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 February 2025

Outcome

The Pines Special School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

There is an infectious positivity in this welcoming and extremely popular school. This is a big school with an even bigger heart. At the start of every day, pupils are greeted with a smile from staff who are passionate about securing the best outcomes for them. Staff take the time and care to get to know pupils well, including their likes and dislikes. This is a school that is characterised by positive relationships. Pupils are happy, and they feel a tangible sense of pride about being here.

In classes, around the building and in the playground, pupils are polite, and they behave well. If they struggle, staff are on hand to provide help quickly. As a result, disruption is rare. Staff are diligent about how effectively they supervise pupils and ensure that they are safe.

Staff have high expectations of pupils. Staff demonstrate a deep understanding of autism and successfully adapt activities to pupils' needs and starting points. This ensures that activities are accessible and achievable. Lessons are calm and industrious, and pupils are keen to share their learning. They maintain positive attitudes and work hard to do their best. From their starting points, pupils do well here, both academically and in their social and emotional development.

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

The school has designed and put in place an ambitious and intelligently structured curriculum for all subjects. It has carefully decided on the exact knowledge and skills pupils will need both in the academic curriculum and in learning for life. The curriculum is split into pre-formal and formal pathways, and many pupils follow a hybrid of the two. This means that their learning journeys are personalised, and they follow a curriculum

that is just right for them. Flexibility in the pathways ensures that there are no ceilings placed on what pupils can achieve. Pupils work towards a range of qualifications, including GCSEs. The school has provided staff with support and guidance on how to deliver the curriculum effectively. However, the school does not check how effectively some aspects of the curriculum are being implemented. For instance, there are inconsistencies in how teachers emphasise key vocabulary or make best use of teaching time so that pupils get the maximum benefit from their lessons.

Teachers and teaching assistants present information clearly and sensitively to pupils. Staff demonstrate a strong subject knowledge, along with the skills to adapt learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. All pupils have an autistic spectrum condition, and staff are also vigilant about swiftly identifying any other additional needs pupils may have.

Starting in Reception, the school's approach to enabling and developing pupils' communication skills is a strength. Some pupils are pre-verbal, but this does not prevent them from communicating their thoughts, needs and wishes. The school's approach to using pictures and symbols to help pupils communicate is proving successful. These are used well in lessons and throughout the school to make sure all pupils have a voice.

Pupils' reading skills vary widely. Teachers ensure that pupils get what they need to improve. Regular, bespoke phonics sessions are in place for those pupils who need them, and pupils' skills and knowledge are improving as a result. Some pupils are not yet ready to learn phonics. Teachers provide them with activities that help them discriminate sounds for learning phonics when they are ready.

The wider development of pupils is high on the school's agenda. The school makes careful checks on pupils' emotional and social development. A focus on careers and skills for later life is a thread that runs across much of the school's work and starts in Reception. This does not stop when pupils leave in Year 11 as staff continue to support and visit pupils in their next settings. Along with this, work to support pupils' mental health is a strength. The school provides therapeutic support when pupils and staff need it. A comprehensive programme of visits, visitors and work experience helps bring learning to life.

The school enjoys a highly positive reputation across the city and is enormously over-subscribed each year. The vast majority of parents are extremely appreciative of the caring culture of the school and say that their children have benefited greatly from their time here.

There is an enormous sense of pride and satisfaction among staff. The school considers staff's well-being and workload and provides effective support when necessary. Governors too are proud to be associated with The Pines Special School and fulfil their roles with diligence. Everybody here shares a palpable drive to do the best for each and every pupil.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is some inconsistency in how effectively the curriculum is implemented. As a result, opportunities are missed to maximise the impact on pupils' learning. The school should develop how it quality assures provision so that it provides teachers with the necessary support to maximise pupils' learning in every lesson.

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 to be good 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 good for overall effectiveness in July 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	103622
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10343752
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	3 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	284
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Wendy Sartain
Headteacher	Emma Pearce
Website	www.thepinesspecialschool.com
Dates of previous inspection	9 and 10 July 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils at this school have an education, health and care plan.
- All pupils at this school have an autistic spectrum condition.
- Since the last inspection, the school has grown significantly, now having 115 more pupils.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

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 leaders and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and other leaders.

- An inspector met with the chair of the board of governors and with representatives from the local authority.
- 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 visited a sample of lessons, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at breaktimes. Inspectors spoke formally with groups of pupils, as well as talking to pupils in lessons and around school.
- The lead inspector considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text responses. He also took account of responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.
- An inspector listened to some pupils reading to a member of school staff.
- The lead inspector reviewed a range of documents, including school improvement plans, the school website and minutes from governing body meetings.

Inspection team

Gareth Morgan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Susan Hickerton

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
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