

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Merryfields School

Hoon Avenue, Newcastle, Staffordshire ST5 9NY

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 May 2025

Outcome

Merryfields School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Neil Brannigan. This school is part of Manor Hall Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Philip Harrison, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Edward Fitchett.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive in the school's calm, nurturing and welcoming environment. The school's mission of 'nurturing a love of learning for life' is a reality for staff and pupils here. Staff have high expectations for pupils' academic and wider success. These expectations are realised, and pupils achieve very well.

Staff understand the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) of their pupils exceptionally well. Pupils enjoy strong, respectful relationships with staff. They are supported with high levels of care and dignity. Consequently, pupils are settled, safe and happy.

Strong foundations for pupils' enduring success start in the early years. Children's communication and interactions, and independence are highly prioritised. The school promotes a wealth of opportunities for pupils to share their voice, including through visual boards, objects of reference and suitable electronic devices. This means that pupils communicate their thoughts, feelings and needs throughout the day very effectively.

Pupils have a wealth of wider opportunities. These are carefully designed to prepare pupils for life beyond school. Pupils practise what they learn in the classroom within the wider community, for example by visiting a cafe, trips to the library and going shopping, where pupils learn to manage their money.

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

The school is unwavering in its commitment to deliver high-quality education for its pupils. The curriculum is broad, ambitious and starts in the early years. There is a sharp focus on supporting pupils' academic and wider developmental needs. In many subjects, including personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), the school has identified clearly the specific knowledge and skills pupils will learn over time. For example, in preparation for their first trip outside of school, pupils learn about the importance of sitting safely in a vehicle and how to use a seatbelt. However, in a few subjects, the key knowledge, skills and vocabulary pupils learn are too broad and not identified precisely enough. This means that, sometimes, pupils' knowledge does not build on their prior learning in a consistent way.

The needs of pupils with SEND are accurately identified and met exceptionally well. Staff support the wide range of SEND needs with expertise. The school provides a plethora of personalised interventions to help pupils. It checks closely the impact of these interventions and pupils achieve strong outcomes. This is particularly effective in areas such as regulation, sensory processing and communication.

The school promotes pupils' love of reading. Pupils enjoy daily stories, rhymes and phonics teaching. Staff are well equipped to teach pupils how to read. Misconceptions are identified early and addressed quickly. Pupils with additional and specific SEND needs engage with sound and print in a meaningful way. This supports them to quickly move on to a more structured phonics programme. As a result, many older pupils leave school reading key texts accurately.

In lessons, staff skilfully adapt teaching to meet pupils' SEND needs and abilities. There is a strong focus on retrieval, repetition and practice of important information. Activities and resources are well matched to pupils' individual starting points.

Positive behaviour and attitudes are a strength. Pupils are calm, settled and know the school's routines well. Staff respond with empathy and consistency. They skilfully support pupils when they spot changes in pupils' behaviour or manner. Staff know precisely how pupils may be communicating a need with them. They act quickly when these changes arise. Pupils' mental health and well-being are considered well. Pupils share their worries and readily identify and name trusted adults.

The support for pupils' personal development is effective. Pupils learn important life skills from a young age, including money management, healthy relationships and personal safety. These important life skills start in the early years, where children go on weekly visits out into the community. Pupils learn about different religions. They visit synagogues, mosques and the local church. They experience a range of leadership opportunities, such as being part of the school council, as head boy and head girl. This promotes pupils' confidence very well.

The school is led with care, compassion and high expectations for staff and pupils. All decisions are made in the best interests of pupils. The school is supported very well by

the trust and by its local governing body. The school shares expert knowledge and practices with other schools. Staff are proud to work here. Most parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school's supportive ethos and the progress their children make.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, the school has not identified precisely the key knowledge, skills and vocabulary pupils should learn. This means that, sometimes, pupils do not build on their prior learning in a clear and cumulative way. The school should define the precise knowledge, skills and vocabulary pupils will learn across the curriculum.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Merryfields School, to be good for overall effectiveness 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](#)' 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	143897
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10378271
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	113
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Edward Fitchett
CEO of the trust	Philip Harrison
Headteacher	Neil Brannigan
Website	merryfields.manorhall.academy
Dates of previous inspection	14 and 15 January 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A new assistant headteacher took up post in September 2024.
- Merryfields School is a specialist provider for pupils with SEND needs, including autism spectrum condition, severe learning difficulties, sensory and medical needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school does not 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 the school and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.

- The inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers, the chair of the trust, governors, subject leaders, teachers and pupils. They also talked with parents. Inspectors also talked informally with staff, including transport assistants and drivers.
- The lead inspector met with the CEO, the chief education lead and the trust's school improvement lead.
- The lead inspector also met with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning, looked at samples of pupils' work and spoke with teachers.
- Inspectors looked at a sample of individual education plans for pupils with SEND.
- Inspectors spoke to groups of pupils, formally and informally, about their learning and experiences at school.
- Inspectors observed informal times to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- 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 considered responses to Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments. Inspectors also looked at responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's self-evaluation, school policies, curriculum documents and SEND records.

Inspection team

Anna Vrahimi, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Simon Smith

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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