

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

Hill Rise, Kempston, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK42 7EB

Inspection dates:

1 and 2 April 2025

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils receive excellent levels of personalised care and attention from dedicated staff. The school celebrates and champions each pupil's unique qualities and abilities. Pupils can express their wishes and feelings due to the bespoke communication methods in place. These adaptations also mean pupils fully access the learning. Pupils are heard, valued and safe.

Pupils achieve well from their starting points to meet their education, health and care plan (EHC plan) outcomes. All pupils in sixth form go on to sustained post-19 education or training. Pupils who are ready complete formal qualifications. Pupils are prepared well for adulthood due to a carefully designed work and life skills curriculum. The use of the onsite 'bungalow' supports this.

Pupils like how everyone gets along. They make friends. Staff and pupils show high levels of mutual respect. There are rarely instances of unkind behaviour, but if so, these are addressed swiftly. As a result, the school is a calm and good-humoured learning environment.

Pupils develop their confidence and independence in the community through visits to local amenities, swimming and a residential trip. There are clubs offered in school for art, technology and sport. The summer music festival is popular. Pupils take an active role in school council and in fundraising, including for the sixth-form prom.

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

The school has successfully navigated a period of turbulence since the last inspection. It has ensured that an ambitious curriculum is in place, tailored specifically to the needs of

the pupils. This bespoke curriculum builds knowledge appropriately over time from early years through to sixth form. The school has expertly interwoven the development of communication and language knowledge through all curriculum areas.

The school matches pupils' overall EHC plan targets to their learning activities. Across the whole school, pupils have regular opportunities to work on these specific targets and, as a result, succeed in meeting them. The school also acts upon the advice of external specialists to ensure pupils' EHC plans are followed, including for pupils who need medical care when at school.

Pupils follow the intended curriculum. Staff take great care to provide personalised learning plans. The school has clearly mapped out what pupils need to know and in what order. Staff use this to check how well pupils are learning.

The school has recently started work to support pupils to remember and recall knowledge more securely when learning independently. Pupils enjoy this opportunity to apply what they know. However, this work is still in its infancy. Some learning activities are not designed precisely enough, which can confuse pupils. At times, staff are not consistently checking how well pupils are able to recall and rehearse prior learning.

From early years upwards, pupils learn how to communicate through symbols, signing and use of technology. This knowledge builds incrementally. Pupils soon become adept users of their communication tools. Once ready, pupils access a structured phonics programme and learn to read successfully. They read books that are well matched to their reading ability. Pupils also enjoy reading and having stories read to them. Staff choose books that represent diversity and ones that pupils can join in with to develop vocabulary.

The school recognises that some pupils need extra support to prepare them for learning letters and sounds. They have in place a clearly thought-out pre-reading curriculum. This has only recently been introduced, so staff are still becoming familiar with it. As a result, these early pre-reading activities are not yet consistently aligned with pupils' abilities. Some pupils can stay on the same activity for longer than necessary. This hinders some pupils from accessing the more formal phonics scheme sooner.

Across the whole school, pupils have a positive attitude to learning. Pupils are proud of their achievements. They enjoy school. Attendance is improving. The school takes effective and supportive action to ensure pupils are in school when they are well enough to do so. Pupils communicate their concerns or worries to trusted adults. This reduces any anxieties, and so pupils are ready to learn. They benefit from predictable routines and an appropriately adapted learning and play environment. Transitions into school each day are smooth and well managed. The school does not tolerate any discriminatory behaviours. Pupils are very accepting of each other and show generosity of spirit to their peers. This results in a harmonious school full of dignity and respect.

A strength of the school is how well it prepares pupils for adulthood. Every pupil, from early years onwards, follows a personal development programme that builds life skills. This starts with developing independence and improving confidence. It includes food preparation, being independent around the home and coping when out shopping or

crossing the road. Pupils are taught about personal safety and managing risk. Staff skilfully adapt learning so pupils know about issues such as online safety, healthy living and consent in an appropriate way for their understanding and age.

Pupils are encouraged to pursue their talents and interests such as in drama or design and technology. As they get older, pupils access tailored work experience opportunities and receive impartial careers advice. Sixth-form students are supported effectively with college applications and interviews.

Governors have the skills and expertise to fulfil their role. They have supported the school throughout the recent period of turbulence to address important operational matters effectively. However, it has meant they have not been sufficiently focused on strategic oversight of some aspects of the quality of education. Governors and leaders have ensured that staff well-being during this period of change has been a priority, and staff are appreciative of this.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some instances, the work set for pupils at the very earliest stages of reading does not match precisely to their ability. Pupils' gaps in knowledge are filled, but staff do not move pupils on to new learning quickly enough. This limits how soon pupils move onto the more formal phonics programme. The school needs to check that pupils have well-matched early reading activities that allow them to progress their reading knowledge in a more timely manner so they maximise what they are capable of.
- There are inconsistencies in how well the school ensures pupils recall or apply their learning successfully during independent learning time. Activities are, at times, not designed well enough to ensure pupils consolidate their knowledge. The school should ensure staff are supported in designing and delivering activities that help pupils recall and demonstrate their knowledge.
- The school has been through a period of change during which governors have had a more operational focus. This has limited their strategic oversight of some school priorities. Governors need to ensure they have a clearer strategic approach to how they oversee the quality of education in school going forward.

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 third ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in November 2012.

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	109742
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10345102
Type of school	All-through
School category	Community special
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	124
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	20
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Bernie Crease
Headteacher	Joe Creswick
Website	www.ridgewayschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 November 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There have been changes to the leadership structure since the last inspection. This school is now led by an executive headteacher who also oversees another local school. He is supported by a head of school and other senior leaders. The school is part of a soft federation with Ivel Valley School and College. This means it has a separate governing body but shares staff and resources across the two schools.
- This school has children aged two to six years in its early years classes and a separate sixth form for students to Year 14.
- All pupils at this school have an EHC plan. The school primarily caters for pupils with physical disabilities, autism and/or specific learning difficulties, including communication and cognition.
- The school currently uses one unregistered 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 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 that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, the assistant headteacher, the head of sixth form, subject leaders, teachers and support staff.
- The lead inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing board and two governing board members.
- To evaluate the quality of education, inspectors met with staff, visited classes, looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils from across the school.
- Inspectors also reviewed documentation provided by the school, including the school development plan, its self-evaluation document and governor minutes.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and children; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts children's interest first.
- Inspectors met with groups of staff and considered the opinions expressed through the staff survey.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents expressed through Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments, and from telephone calls and face-to-face conversations with some parents.
- Inspectors talked to pupils from all year groups during the inspection.

Inspection team

Sara Boyce, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

James Chester

Ofsted Inspector

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