

Inspection of The Forest School

Park Lane, Knaresborough, North Yorkshire HG5 0DQ

Inspection dates:	23 and 24 April 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Emma Nuttall. This school is part of Wellspring 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), Mark Wilson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Cheryl Hobson. There is also an executive principal, Shona Crichton, who is responsible for this school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have positive and trusting relationships with staff. Pupils greet visitors warmly, showing politeness and respect. One pupil, reflecting the views of many, said, 'It's a nice friendly place here, we welcome everyone.'

The school provides an inclusive, well-structured curriculum. Staff understand pupils' needs well. Expectations for learning and growth are ambitious and highly personalised to pupils' individual needs. These are underpinned by pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Pupils are well supported to thrive academically and personally, competently guided by advice from specialists.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary. They are focused and settled in lessons. Pupils follow consistent routines that help them to access learning successfully. When pupils need space or time to regulate, they are skilfully supported.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They speak positively about staff and appreciate the help they receive. Attendance is closely checked with support provided for pupils to attend regularly.

The personal development programme is a strength of the school. Pupils develop their leadership skills by taking on roles such as school councillors and supporting younger peers. They learn about online safety and managing money. They understand the importance of equality and respect. Events celebrating diversity, including 'the Pride parade', help pupils feel safe, valued and included.

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

The school's ambitious curriculum is carefully considered from early years to key stage 4. Pupils learn the curriculum in lessons alongside their peers of the same age. The curriculum is structured so pupils access their learning at the right level. Staff check regularly how well pupils are learning the curriculum. Information on personalised learning plans is communicated well to staff. Targets are specifically matched to address gaps in pupils' understanding.

Communication strategies are consistently embedded across the school. Makaton, core communication boards, now and next boards, electronic devices and the spoken word are all part of the school's 'total communication' strategy. Staff develop pupils' communication and language through activities to promote turn-taking, sharing and talking together. Teachers use clear, precise words to secure pupils' early language skills. Key vocabulary is deliberately identified and taught. This is repeated to enhance pupils' understanding. Some older pupils communicate their understanding of the curriculum in writing. However, there is a lack of focus on developing pupils' basic skills in writing. For these pupils, gaps in writing skills are not identified and addressed effectively enough.

The school has strengthened the reading curriculum. In lessons, pupils study key texts using sensory and interactive activities. Since the last inspection, the school has

embedded its approach to teaching phonics. Pupils who are ready to learn phonics develop their word-reading skills well. Staff help pupils to read new words by identifying the sounds letters make. Pupils quickly learn to blend these sounds together in order to read words. However, pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to re-read words once they have sounded them out. This means some pupils do not read as fluently and confidently as they could.

The support for pupils' behaviour is excellent. There is a calm, positive learning environment. A range of highly effective strategies are used to support pupils to behave well and regulate themselves. Individualised behaviour plans equip staff to expertly respond to behaviour linked to pupils' specific needs. Staff are highly skilful in guiding and supporting pupils back into learning. This ensures that pupils are exceptionally well supported to access the intended curriculum. As pupils get older, they become increasingly independent and manage their own behaviour. They enjoy friendships, socialising and participating in all that the school has to offer.

The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum is carefully woven through all aspects of the curriculum. A range of meaningful activities, such as enrichment days, horse riding and choir, build pupils' confidence and sense of belonging. Repeated visits to places like farms develop pupils' sense of responsibility. Preparation for adulthood starts as soon as pupils start school. Pupils are quickly taught how to be resilient and manage any challenges they may face. Pupils, from a young age, learn about careers through real-life experiences and themed activities. They explore different jobs and develop important life skills. Older pupils benefit from independent careers advice and a well-considered careers programme that includes work experience.

The school has made significant progress since the last inspection. The trust and leaders at all levels have the experience to ensure that this journey continues. Parents and carers comment positively about the changes. They welcome the increased opportunities to attend events in school. The school recognises how the recent changes have had an impact on staff workload and well-being and plans are in place to address this.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school does not teach pupils reading skills beyond word reading effectively enough. This means that some pupils do not learn to read as fluently and confidently as they could. The school must continue to refine the reading curriculum and ensure that all staff have the skills and expertise so that pupils develop the necessary reading skills to become confident, fluent readers.

- The writing curriculum does not give enough attention to the technical aspects of writing. This includes spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting. This means that some pupils are not able to write with accuracy. The school should ensure that the curriculum for writing gives sufficient attention to building pupils' fluency in the basic skills of writing, so that pupils are able to write independently across all areas of the curriculum.

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	147819
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	10379416
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	151
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Cheryl Hobson
CEO of the trust	Mark Wilson
Headteacher	Emma Nuttall
Website	www.forest.n-yorks.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	21 and 22 February 2023, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school provides specialist education for pupils with specific learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorder, speech, language and communication needs, visual impairment, hearing impairment and physical disabilities.
- The school has provision for two-year-olds.
- 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.
- The school uses one registered and one unregistered alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements

(quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers and the special educational needs coordinator.
- Inspectors met with leaders from the trust including the CEO. They also met with a member of the local governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with leaders to discuss the curriculum and assessment.
- Inspectors heard pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around the school, at playtime and at lunchtime. Inspectors spoke with pupils about their views of the school, their learning, behaviour and safety.
- 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 the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- Inspectors met with staff to gather their views of the school. They also considered the responses to the Ofsted survey for staff.

Inspection team

Nicola Beaumont, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Tan Ilyas

Ofsted Inspector

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