

Inspection of Applebee Wood Community Specialist School

Far Croft, Lostock Hall, Preston, Lancashire PR5 5SS

Inspection dates:	29 and 30 October 2024
The quality of education	Inadequate
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Inadequate
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy their learning. They want to do well. However, the school is not aspirational enough for pupils' academic achievement. It has not thought clearly enough about what it wants pupils to learn and the order in which new content will be taught. In most subjects, the curriculum is poorly designed and lacks ambition. The school has not given sufficient thought to the key concepts that pupils need to learn and remember. As a result, pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), are not well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.

Pupils, and children in the early years, are happy at school. They enjoy outdoor learning and exploring their woodland environment. Pupils look forward to the days that the school's two therapy dogs, Buddy and Willow, come to visit.

Pupils experience a broad range of opportunities beyond the taught curriculum. These include the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, sports and music clubs as well as a student council. These experiences promote pupils' communication and help them to interact with others.

Pupils behave well. They learn to follow routines from the start of their time in the early years. Pupils said that they have a trusted adult that they can speak to and that this helps them to feel safe.

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

The school does not have an accurate view of its effectiveness. This means that it does not understand its shortcomings, nor has it acted to bring about necessary improvements. For example, the school has not acted with sufficient urgency to ensure that pupils learn from an ambitious curriculum. Members of the governing body have not challenged the school about the decline in the quality of pupils' education. Although staff are appreciative of the support that they receive to manage their workload, they are not helped to develop their expertise in curriculum design and delivery. There is a lack of capacity within the school and the governing body to bring about sustained and positive change.

The curriculum, from the early years onwards, is weak and poorly designed. This means that pupils miss out on important learning. They do not build knowledge securely in readiness for the next stage of their education.

Subject leadership is ineffective. Teachers do not receive the guidance or support that they need to know what essential knowledge should be taught. As a result, individual teachers resort to designing disconnected lessons using a range of different resources. Pupils complete a series of one-off tasks that fail to meet their needs or build their knowledge. Learning activities are often more focused on engaging pupils than developing their understanding of key concepts. The curriculum does not help pupils to develop a rich body of knowledge that enables them to learn and remember more.

Teachers do not use assessment strategies to check pupils' understanding effectively enough. Staff often move on to new learning before pupils have a secure grasp of what has been taught. Consequently, many pupils have gaps in their learning and some pupils struggle to make sense of new subject content. Pupils across different age-ranges do not achieve well.

The school works successfully with external professionals to help identify pupils' needs. However, the impact of this support does not make enough difference to pupils' learning. This is because teachers are ill-equipped to follow the advice and guidance that they receive. Consequently, teachers are not able to adapt learning to meet pupils' individual needs and the targets in their education, health and care (EHC) plans.

Although the school has implemented a phonics programme, it has not ensured that children in the early years, or pupils at the early stages of learning to read, gain secure phonics knowledge. This is because the school has not provided staff with the support that they need to deliver the phonics programme effectively. As a result, some pupils do not become fluent readers.

Pupils and staff appreciate the newly introduced behaviour system. This is beginning to have a positive impact. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is improving. They behave well, overall. Teachers now have appropriate systems and strategies to deal with low-level disruption, should it occur. The school has implemented suitable procedures to identify the barriers that cause some pupils to be persistently absent. Increasingly, the school's coordinated approach to improving attendance is reducing pupils' absence rates.

The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum is designed to help pupils to learn important concepts, including healthy relationships. Although key themes have been identified, the order in which this information is taught has not been considered well enough. This means that pupils do not build up an appropriate and logical understanding of important issues, such as fundamental British values, over time. As a result, pupils are not prepared as well as they should be for life beyond school. Pupils receive suitable careers education and guidance. This includes individual interviews and opportunities to undertake work experience.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There are minor weaknesses with the school's safeguarding arrangements. Safeguarding records are kept in different places. This makes it difficult for the school to assure itself that any concerns about pupils are reported, recorded and lead to appropriate action.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum is poorly designed. Teachers do not have the guidance that they need to ensure that pupils learn well. This means that children in the early years, and pupils in other year groups, do not develop a rich body of knowledge in different subjects. The school must ensure that it identifies the important concepts that pupils should learn. It should also make sure that subject content, including in the PSHE curriculum, is carefully ordered so that teachers know what to teach and when this should happen. This is to ensure that pupils are ready for their next steps within and beyond school.
- In the absence of curriculum guidance, teachers select activities that do not help pupils to develop their knowledge or to understand key concepts. Pupils' learning is disconnected from what has gone before and what will come later. Teachers do not check what pupils know and can do. As a result, pupils do not achieve well. The school must ensure that teachers have the subject knowledge and expertise to enable pupils to build their understanding over time.
- The school's phonics programme is not taught consistently well. Consequently, children in the early years, and pupils at the early stage of learning to read, do not gain sufficient phonics knowledge. This hinders them from reading fluently. The school must ensure that staff are sufficiently trained to implement the phonics programme consistently well.
- The school's capacity to improve pupils' quality of education is weak. It does not have a clear understanding of its weaknesses. Subject leadership is underdeveloped. The school does not have the expertise to design and deliver an ambitious curriculum. It has not equipped staff well enough to implement the advice that they receive about pupils' individual learning needs. As a result, pupils do not achieve well. The school must ensure that it builds its expertise and leadership capacity to bring about sustained improvements to pupils' education.
- Members of the governing board have not provided effective support and challenge to improve the quality of education on offer to pupils. This means that pupils are not ready for their next steps. Governors must ensure that they develop the necessary expertise to understand the school's effectiveness so that they are able to hold it to account for its work.
- The school has not ensured that it maintains safeguarding records coherently. This makes it difficult for the school to assure itself that any concerns about pupils result in appropriate actions. The school should ensure that accurate, up to date and consistent records are kept of all concerns about pupils' safety and welfare.

The school may not appoint early career teachers before the next monitoring inspection. The position regarding the appointment of early career teachers will be considered again during any monitoring inspection we carry out.

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	119880
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	10294340
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	169
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Carol Wooldridge
Headteacher	Michelle Padgeon
Website	www.applebeewood.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	7 and 8 February 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, the senior leadership team has been reorganised. A new deputy headteacher joined the school in September 2024.
- The school use seven unregistered alternative provisions.
- All pupils at the school have an EHC plan. The school caters for pupils with a wide range of needs. These include autism, moderate learning difficulties, social, emotional and mental health and speech, language and communication needs.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- At the time of the inspection, there were too few children in the early years to reach a judgement about this 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.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's educational provision.
- Inspectors discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, staff, pupils and members of the governing body. An inspector met with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in communication and early reading, physical education, art and design and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning, and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also considered the curriculum in other subjects. An inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- 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 spoke to staff about pupils' behaviour and their workload in school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. They took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils through discussions held with pupils during the inspection.

Inspection team

Rebecca Sharples, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Maria McGarry	Ofsted Inspector
Lindy Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector

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