

Inspection of a good school: Bidwell Brook School

Shinner's Bridge, Dartington, Totnes, Devon TQ9 6JU

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 June 2023

Outcome

Bidwell Brook School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to this happy school. They arrive in the morning with smiles for the staff who greet them, eager to get on with the rest of the day. Pupils are proud of their school. They show interest in visitors and enthusiastically share how much they enjoy school. They have a voice and have influenced many improvements around the school.

The executive headteacher and her staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour and conduct. All staff use consistent language and thoughtful approaches to support pupils. For example, pupils learn to identify their emotional state and develop strategies to manage their own behaviour. As a result, there is a calm atmosphere around the school.

Pupils have positive relationships with staff. They know that adults are there to help and keep them safe. Pupils say that bullying is rare. They are confident that adults will deal with it quickly if it were to happen.

Pupils are enthusiastic about the range of activities they take part in. They can gain a sense of adventure exploring the school's extensive wooded area or try water sports for the first time. Leaders ensure all pupils experience challenges and build their confidence.

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

Leaders have high expectations for what pupils can achieve. All pupils who attend the school have complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have designed a curriculum suitable to meet the diverse needs of their pupils.

Reading and communication are priorities in the school. Staff expertly facilitate the purposeful use of a wide range of communication aids. This empowers pupils to have and to use their 'voice'. This helps pupils to develop functional communication and independence. Some pupils develop a love of reading through a sensory exploration of texts and stories. Other pupils learn to read using phonics. Leaders have ensured that

there is a well-organised system in place for this. Where appropriate, this is effectively supported through the use of electronic devices.

Pupils learn well in most subjects. In dance, for example, teachers check on what pupils know and remember. They match activities well to pupils' abilities. This helps pupils to build knowledge and skills well over time. As a result, pupils can explain how dance helps them build strength and keep their backs supple. This helps with their posture. However, this is not the case in some other areas of the curriculum. Some teachers do not check what pupils know and can do well enough. For example, in reading, some staff do not consistently identify sounds pupils need to practice in order to gain fluency. This slows pupils' progress in building their knowledge in these subjects.

Staff know every pupil well. They understand the distinct needs of each pupil. This allows them to communicate effectively with each pupil. Staff quickly notice if a pupil needs a sensory or personal break. This proactive approach ensures that there is minimal disruption to learning.

Pupils' wider development is designed well. Leaders recognise the importance of helping pupils to build their self-confidence and resilience. There is also a commitment to give pupils a voice. For example, leaders involve members of the school council in staff recruitment. Leaders have also involved pupils in planning improvements to the outdoor space.

The curriculum prepares pupils well for their next stage of learning and adulthood. They learn how to keep themselves safe in school, in the community and online. They know about appropriate social interactions and what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Pupils learn about different jobs and undertake work experience in school. Students in the sixth form have opportunities to work in the local community. They visit colleges and training providers. Staff work with pupils' parents to help pupils transfer successfully to their next stage of education.

Governors are ambitious for the school. They carry out their duties effectively and know the school well. Governors ask challenging questions to help the school improve. Staff are proud to work at the school. They value the support they receive from leaders, particularly with regards to their well-being and workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Systems for checking on the suitability of staff who work at the school are meticulous.

Leaders and the governors responsible for safeguarding ensure there are thorough systems in place to protect pupils from harm. All staff receive regular safeguarding updates. Leaders also train staff promptly on joining the school. Staff know and understand their safeguarding responsibilities. They understand why pupils at the school might be at extra risk because of their complex needs.

Leaders work well with a wide range of external agencies involved in pupils' lives. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through the curriculum.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not check well enough what pupils remember. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their learning and do not build their knowledge well over time. This slows their progress across the curriculum. Leaders need to ensure that assessment is used effectively to check on what pupils know and can do, so that they are well prepared for their next stage.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 school to be good in January 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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	113643
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10256801
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	158
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Steven Finnemore
Headteacher	Nikki Burroughs
Website	www.bidwellbrook.devon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 October 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Bidwell Brook School is a special school for pupils aged from three to 19 years.
- The school provides for pupils with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The school is federated with Ellen Tinkham School in Exeter and together they form the Learn to Live Federation. The school is also part of the SENTient Trust with other special schools in the local authority.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The executive headteacher was appointed in March 2022.
- The head of school was appointed in March 2023.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- 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 that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the head of school and other senior and curriculum leaders.
- The lead inspector met with the chair and two other members of the governing body. The lead inspector also had a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English (including reading and communication), personal, social and health education and physical development. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To assess the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised the single central record of recruitment checks and the procedures for safer recruitment of staff. The lead inspector held a meeting with the designated safeguarding leads to discuss actions taken following recorded concerns. Inspectors met with staff to check their understanding of safeguarding and the impact of the training received.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. In addition, inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Mark Burgess, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Tracy Hannon

Ofsted Inspector

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