Inspection of a good school: The Mendip School

Edmund Rack Road, Prestleigh, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 4FZ

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 October 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might be outstanding if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Natalie Hanna. This school is part of The Partnership Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Emily Massey, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Belinda Deery.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils follow an ambitious curriculum and achieve well. They receive strong pastoral support from trusted adults. The curriculum is closely tailored to pupils' learning and development needs. Typically, pupils are attentive in lessons and work hard. They take pride in their work. Children in the early years receive very precise teaching across the curriculum. This develops their early communication skills and physical development superbly.

The curriculum prepares pupils for their future lives as independent citizens exceptionally well. Older pupils learn to voice their views confidently in discussions about healthy relationships, physical health and ethical dilemmas. Everyone learns how to cook. Many extra-curricular activities build well on pupils' prior knowledge. For example, travelling to London by train enables pupils to apply what they know about reading timetables. Working in the community café develops pupils' confidence, self-esteem and use of money. All pupils experience a residential visit. Camp is a highlight for many.

Pupils and staff eat lunch together. This reinforces the importance of maintaining positive behaviours and social interactions brilliantly. Pupils enjoy talking about their day and wider interests. Staff join in with outside games and the 'golden mile'. Pupils value using the outdoor gym equipment, keeping fit, and playing games, such as cricket.

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

Leaders are highly knowledgeable. Many staff are experts in their field. Staff's outreach work with other local schools and partnerships is commendable. Leaders, along with central trust staff, have a precise understanding of the school's effectiveness. They use this information astutely to ensure that the curriculum pupils receive is ever improving. The various well-thought-out curriculum pathways combine both academic curriculums and life-skills curriculums. This ensures that all pupils receive an ambitious curriculum that builds successfully on what they know already, including in the sixth form.

The school is swift to assess pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) on entry. Staff work with other professionals to ensure pupils' transition into school is smooth. They are quick to identify and resolve any potential barriers to learning. Staff implement the curriculum very well. It has a strong impact on what pupils know across subjects. When relative weaknesses in sequences of work or assessment practices arise, the school is proactive in addressing these straight away.

Developing effective communication pervades the school. The youngest pupils benefit from a language-rich environment, where they gain a love of stories, songs and rhymes. The curriculum ensures that these pupils increase their ability to hear and distinguish sounds and new vocabulary. As soon as they are ready, pupils learn phonics with skilled staff. This continues until pupils are secure in their phonics and read fluently. Staff make reading a priority for all pupils. Pupils read every day and staff check that pupils' reading is improving over time.

The personal, social, health and economic education curriculum underpins all learning throughout the curriculum. The focus on building strong relationships, navigating social interactions, working within social groups and communicating with politeness and respect are strong features evident throughout the curriculum. Pupils learn from this approach very quickly and, as a result, most pupils are polite, helpful and respectful.

Pupils study for, and are successful in, gaining a range of GCSEs, functional skills, entry level qualifications and/or courses that develop important life skills for independent living. Pupils who attend the hospital education reintegration service (HERs), receive an ambitious curriculum. This is equipping them well for going back to mainstream school after periods of extended absence.

Pupils receive effective careers education. When pupils leave at the end of Year 11, they go on to college or employment. Sixth-form pupils who remain at the school benefit from a personalised education that focuses on developing life skills for employment and independent living. Alongside this, pupils take vocational qualifications that meet their needs. After much planning, a new venture for sixth-form pupils aims to achieve collaborative supportive employment at a new site near Street. This work is in its infancy.

The trust is insightful when making decisions that affect this school. For example, trustees have ensured that there is strong leadership capacity to hold staff to account for the quality of education pupils receive at the school, including for those pupils who now attend the HERs site. Nonetheless, the trust knows that while most parents are highly

positive about the school, at a time when curriculum enhancements and changes to sixth-form provision are afoot, sustaining and strengthening relationships with parents remains a top priority.

The school monitors pupils' attendance and behaviour very closely. The vast majority of pupils attend exceptionally well. The school's approaches to supporting pupils to regulate well in lessons and around the school are highly effective.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in July 2018.

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	142118
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10298038
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	219
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Belinda Deery
Principal	Natalie Hanna
Website	www.themendipschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	12 and 13 July 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The Mendip School is part of The Partnership Trust (TPT), which contains 16 primary schools and 2 special schools.
- Pupils who attend the main school site have a primary diagnosis of autism (ASD) and speech, language and communication needs and have an education, health and care plan.
- Since September 2022, the headteacher of this school is also the headteacher of the Hospital Education Reintergration Service (HERs) at Bath and North Somerset (BANES) local authority. HERs is not separately registered as a school. All pupils who attend HERs are on roll at the Mendip School and dual registered with another school in BANES local authority. HERs is based at another TPT school approximately one hour away from The Mendip School. HERs occupies the top floor of Abbot Alphege Academy. There is a HERs manager.
- A small number of pupils in key stage 4 study for GCSEs at a local secondary school.

- Pupils in the sixth form study on the main school site. They are also attending a new satellite classroom in 'Clarks Village' in the town of Street near Wells.
- The school uses two registered alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in the evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, and other school staff, the chief executive officer, the chair of trustees and a representative of the local governing body.
- An inspector also held a meeting with a representative of the local authority SEND team for Somerset and a representative of BANES local authority to discuss the HERs provision and its commissioning arrangements.
- An inspector visited the HERs site to speak with leaders, visit lessons, review pupils' work, speak with pupils. An inspector also talked to a parent. An inspector also talked to leaders and pupils who are solely on roll at The Mendip School but attend lessons at The Ansford Academy.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, the 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.
- An inspector listened to pupils from key stage 1, 2 and 3, who are at the early stages of reading, read to an adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. They spoke with pupils and staff about behaviour.
- An inspector considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments, and responses to the staff and pupil survey.

Inspection team

Julie Carrington, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Susan Aykin	His Majesty's Inspector

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