

Inspection of a good school: Rochdale Pupil Referral Service

Saxon Hall Site, Samson Street, Belfield, Rochdale, Greater Manchester OL16 2XW

Inspection dates:

11 to 12 July 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 not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils told inspectors that they feel well cared for and safe at school. Pupils appreciate the help and support that they receive from staff. Many pupils have had poor educational experiences prior to joining this school. Staff enable most pupils to reengage with learning.

Leaders have high ambitions for all pupils to achieve well. However, leaders have not determined the important knowledge that pupils should learn in some subjects. This means that teachers are unsure what pupils need to learn and remember. Consequently, some pupils do not achieve as well as they should in these subjects.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. From their starting points, most pupils' behaviour improves considerably over time. Leaders have improved the systems for managing pupils' behaviour. However, some staff do not apply these strategies well enough. As a result, in some lessons, pupils' learning is disrupted.

Leaders and staff deal with any incidents of bullying appropriately. Pupils have trusted adults to turn to if they have any concerns or worries.

Pupils have many opportunities to develop their confidence and self-esteem. For example, pupils spoke excitedly about weekly swimming lessons and outdoor activity trips. Key stage 1 and 2 pupils enjoyed a recent visit to a farm. Pupils have a voice in developing the school. For example, pupils have been involved in decisions about the books that leaders have purchased for them.

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

Leaders are in the process of developing the school's curriculum. In some subjects, leaders have defined the content that they want pupils to learn and the order in which this content should be taught. In these subjects, teachers choose appropriate activities that help pupils to learn well. However, in other subjects, leaders have not finalised what they want pupils to know and when this new learning should be taught. Teachers are not clear what pupils need to learn and remember. This means that pupils do not deepen their knowledge in these subjects as well as they should.

Previously, many staff were teaching subjects that were outside their experience and expertise. Leaders have reduced the number of non-specialist subjects that staff are required to teach. Nevertheless, in a few subjects, a small number of staff do not have the subject knowledge needed to deliver the curriculum well. This hampers how well pupils learn.

Most pupils have gaps in their learning as a result of significant disruptions to their education. Leaders carry out appropriate checks when pupils join the school. This helps leaders to identify pupils' social, emotional and academic needs. Teachers use assessment strategies well to check what pupils have learned and remembered.

Leaders have made reading a high priority. Leaders identify any gaps in pupils' reading knowledge as soon as they join school. They have ensured that staff are trained to deliver the phonics programme well. Most pupils read books that are matched to the sounds that they know. Staff provide effective support to those pupils who struggle to learn to read. This helps these pupils to catch up with their peers. Increasingly, pupils across the school are supported to read more widely. Leaders have invested in a range of novels so that pupils can read the works of different authors. Most pupils enjoy reading.

Leaders identify the additional needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively. However, some teachers do not adapt the delivery of the subject curriculums effectively for some pupils with SEND. This hinders these pupils from achieving as well as they should.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and at breaktimes. However, the behaviour of some pupils interrupts the learning of others. A small number of teachers do not address these incidents of poor behaviour. Also, at times, staff do not address inappropriate comments made by pupils.

Pupils learn how to interact appropriately with others in different social settings and situations, how to use public transport and how to use maps to navigate. Pupils also develop food preparation skills. Pupils receive helpful impartial careers advice and guidance. They appreciate the support that they receive, such as with writing a curriculum vitae and interview techniques. Leaders provide pupils with appropriate opportunities to learn workplace skills in readiness for future employment. However, leaders have not given sufficient thought to some aspects of the provision in order for pupils' broader development to meet pupils' needs. For instance, pupils' understanding of fundamental British values, such as democracy, and technology and media is limited.

Consequently, pupils do not benefit as well as they should from these programmes of wider development.

Staff are proud to work at the school. Leaders have put into place a range of measures to support staff to manage their workload. Staff also spoke positively about the mental health help that they are able to access. This provides staff with support following high-stress situations.

The management committee has improved its oversight of leaders' work. It has an understanding of the quality of education. The management committee has increased the level of support and challenge that it provides for leaders to improve the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a culture of vigilance in the school. Leaders ensure that staff receive regular safeguarding training. Staff have an appropriate knowledge of how to identify and raise safeguarding concerns. Leaders follow up on all concerns swiftly. They work closely with external agencies, including the police, to support and protect pupils. Leaders carry out careful checks to reassure themselves about the suitability of alternative provision. They follow up on pupils' attendance at these settings daily to make sure that pupils are safe and well.

Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe. They are made aware of potential risks, such as gang culture and knife crime.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, including the programmes to support pupils' wider personal development, leaders have not finalised their curriculum thinking. This is hindering some pupils from learning as well as they should. In these subjects, leaders should ensure that they determine the important knowledge that pupils should learn and the order in which this should be taught.
- Leaders have not ensured that staff are equipped to deliver the curriculum as intended. Some pupils, including those with SEND, do not learn as well as they should in a few subjects. Leaders should ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills needed to enable pupils, including those with SEND, to achieve well.
- A small number of staff do not follow the school's policies and procedures relating to the management of behaviour consistently well. Some pupils' disruptive behaviour is left unchallenged. This means that pupils' learning is disrupted. Leaders should ensure that staff follow the school's behaviour policies and procedures so that pupils' behaviour is managed well.

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 2017.

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	133409
Local authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	10211123
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	143
Appropriate authority	Rochdale local authority
Headteacher	Hannah Speakman
Website	www.theblc.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 January 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. A small number of pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Most pupils have been permanently excluded or are at risk of exclusion from their mainstream schools. The school admits pupils throughout the year. Some pupils at this school are dual registered with their mainstream school, while others are on longer single-registration placements.
- The school operates from premises at five separate sites. There are two main sites. The Saxon Hall site at Samson Street, Belfield, Rochdale OL16 2XW accommodates key stage 4 pupils. The Darnhill Centre at Sutherland Road, Heywood OL10 3PY accommodates pupils in key stages 1 to 4. In addition, the school operates three satellite centres. The Yard at Argyle Parade, Heywood OL10 3RY caters for key stage 3 and 4 pupils. Springvale at Oldham Road Middleton M24 2JZ caters for key stage 3 pupils. The Induction Centre at Sutherland Road, Heywood OL10 3PL caters for key stage 4 pupils.
- A new headteacher was appointed in September 2022.
- Recently, there have been a number of changes to the membership of the management committee. This includes the appointment of a new chair.

- Leaders make use of three registered and nine unregistered alternative providers for a small number of pupils.
- 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.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other senior leaders, subject leaders and staff. Inspectors also met with members of the management committee and representatives of the local authority. Inspectors spoke with leaders from local mainstream schools which have placed pupils at this school. An inspector spoke with representatives of some alternative providers.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experience of school and their views on behaviour and bullying. Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at breaktimes.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including leaders' self-evaluation and improvement plans. They also reviewed the minutes of the management committee meetings.
- Inspectors checked the school's safeguarding policies and procedures and the single central record. Inspectors met with leaders, staff and pupils to check the effectiveness of leaders' safeguarding arrangements.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, English, mathematics and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. An inspector observed pupils reading to familiar staff.
- Inspectors also spoke with leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors conducted visits to the school's other main site and to two satellite sites: The Yard and Springvale.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.
- There were no responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors spoke with some parents and carers by telephone as well as face to face.

Inspection team

Ahmed Marikar, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

David Spruce

His Majesty's Inspector

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