

Bluebell Park School

Cawthorne Walk, Southdene, Kirkby, Liverpool, Merseyside L32 3XP

Inspection dates

3–4 May 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The acting headteachers have ensured that the school's focus on providing a good education for its pupils has continued. The challenges of not having a permanent headteacher for some time are understood and managed well. With the support of other members of staff, leaders have continued to improve teaching and outcomes for pupils.
- The small governing body demonstrates a clear commitment to the school and its pupils. Governors support leaders well and are not afraid to challenge and probe when necessary.
- Pupils are very well cared for. Staff ensure that pupils' learning and their physical needs are met, and the school is well equipped to do this.
- The school is friendly and pupils are happy. Bullying is very nearly non-existent.
- Safeguarding of pupils is given a very high priority. The buildings are safe and secure.
- While some pupils face behavioural challenges, the behaviour of all pupils is very carefully managed. Pupils show respect for each other and for their learning, which contributes well to the school's calm atmosphere.
- Links with the local community form a key part of, and enhance, pupils' experience.
- Systems for assessing pupils' academic progress over time are being refined. In the past, the evaluation of pupils' starting points lacked detail, which makes it harder for staff to measure the overall progress that pupils have made since they started in the school.
- Teaching is carefully planned to meet pupils' individual needs. Teachers are acutely aware of the need to record small steps in pupils' learning and to check how this relates to their engagement and understanding.
- Effective provision in the early years is being enhanced by a new approach to rewarding children when they learn well. The welfare requirements for the early years are met.
- Sixth-form provision works very well, develops students' confidence and improves their skills. External accreditation, including in literacy and numeracy, is very carefully chosen for students to accurately match their stages in learning.
- The arrangements to ensure that pupils experience smooth transitions throughout the different stages of their education are well planned.
- Parents are highly satisfied with the education and opportunities offered.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the search for the right headteacher reaches a conclusion as swiftly as possible so that planning for the future is easier.
- Ensure that the current developments in assessing pupils' academic progress are built on further to allow leaders and teachers to ensure that progress over time is as rapid as possible and the academic gains that pupils make in their journey through the school are clear.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The acting headteachers have rapidly developed their skills, knowledge and confidence. This has enabled them to provide positive leadership at a time of change. They are strongly supported by other senior leaders, some of whom also hold interim posts. Despite the temporary nature of these arrangements, leaders have ensured that the school has continued to move forward during this period. Staff work very hard to make sure that pupils experience good-quality care and education.
- The school is well organised and runs smoothly. This is exemplified in the complex arrangements that ensure that pupils are transported to and from school safely.
- Senior leaders have an honest and detailed understanding of the school, its strengths and development areas. The self-evaluation document is clear and supports a well thought-out plan to further improve the school.
- Middle leaders demonstrate passion and enthusiasm for their responsibilities. They provide support to colleagues and check that planned teaching activities meet pupils' needs. There is a culture of mutual support.
- The system for ensuring that teaching is effective is built into school practice. Information from this indicates that teaching is improving over time. Formal observations of teaching are infrequent but, where training needs are identified, these are swiftly acted on. Training and professional development opportunities are often designed to build on effective practice. For example, the school actively supports highly effective teaching assistants to become teachers.
- The curriculum is well designed and includes an appropriate range of subjects that meet pupils' needs. Although classes typically include a broader age range of pupils than is seen in many other schools, teaching groups are carefully constructed so that teaching works well for the pupils included. Opportunities are taken, whenever these can be developed, to extend pupils' wider skills, for example, by assigning classroom responsibilities to pupils who have severe physical and medical needs. Much teaching is embedded into 'real-world' contexts such as using money when going shopping.
- Careers education is bespoke to individuals but forms part of the school's system to ensure that transition into, through and out of the school works well. There is close contact with key staff inside school and professionals outside school around transition times, to make sure that pupils are not over-faced by the changes that they will experience. Formal events are held for parents and pupils towards the end of pupils' time in school, to provide opportunities for planning for the future. Over time, the proportion of ex-pupils finally gaining employment has increased.
- The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is woven into their school experiences. Even where pupils have little or no verbal communication, they are strongly encouraged to make their own choices. Over time, this helps pupils' independence to grow. They are helped to understand the difference between right and wrong, and are provided with opportunities as diverse as performing in a Shakespeare play to learning about Diwali. There is a strong culture of recognising and celebrating pupils' success. Pupils' understanding of what it means to be part of

modern Britain is supported by their frequent contact with the wider community. Principles about the equal value of all individuals run throughout the school's work.

- Additional funding provided to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used well to remove barriers to learning by meeting their individual needs. There are well thought-out plans for the use of the additional funding available to support disadvantaged pupils and those who need to catch up, and for physical education (PE) and sport premium for primary-age pupils. Disadvantaged pupils achieve in line with others in the school. Sports activities are enjoyed by many pupils, some of whom gain success in regional and national competitions.
- Parents who provided their views through Ofsted's questionnaire were generally very complimentary about the school's provision, for example, describing the 'staggering progress' that their child had made and about the quality of care offered. Staff were similarly positive about their experience and the contribution they make.

Governance of the school

- The governing body is relatively small for a school with the complexities of Bluebell Park. However, this does not limit governors' commitment or impact. They provide strong challenge to leaders, for example, in their double checking of why recorded bullying incidents are so low. Governors' challenge is complemented by effective support for the acting headteachers.
- Governors are fully aware of the uncertainty that not having a permanent headteacher can cause and the importance of filling this vacancy. However, they are determined only to appoint someone whom they consider will provide the very best quality of education for pupils.
- Governors are appropriately involved in the school's system for checking that teachers are being as effective as possible.
- Governors and other leaders ensure that the school's finances are used effectively and check the impact of additional funding, such as that used to support disadvantaged pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff are kept up to date with regular training about safeguarding. When new members of staff join the school, discussion about safeguarding is built into their induction. Staff know about the additional safeguarding risks which pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities may face. The school's high expectations about keeping pupils safe are made clear to visitors, temporary members of staff and contractors.
- The safeguarding and child protection policy is based on a model from the local authority and is accessible on the school website for parents and others.
- The school buildings are designed to be safe. The site is secure and well maintained. Leaders ensure that careful thought is given to reducing any risks to pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers and other staff work together well to help pupils to learn. Staff are highly aware of pupils and their individual needs and plan activities which engage pupils. Staff notice small changes in pupils, which could indicate that they are learning less well than they should and adjust their teaching in response. Members of staff's awareness also means that they are able to closely target questions to the needs of pupils in their class. Learning is frequently based on real-work situations and contexts. For example, in science, younger pupils enjoyed experiencing and thinking about pushing and pulling various real objects and learned effectively about forces.
- Teachers and other staff use the school's wide range of teaching resources to support pupils well. Technology is used effectively, for example in the use of computer-based systems to help pupils who are unable to speak to communicate. The school's facilities include specialist rooms that provide sensory stimulus, safe trampoline experience and swimming pools. All of these are used to encourage pupils' learning and physical well-being in an enjoyable way.
- The high staffing levels and small teaching groups, sometimes including one-to-one support, mean that pupils receive immediate feedback on their effort and success. Teachers and teaching assistants are clear about their roles and work together well. This allows them to ensure that pupils keep their focus and make good progress.
- Staff are highly skilled in encouraging good behaviour through their teaching. If any potential incidents start to arise, their good relationships with pupils help them to unobtrusively reduce tensions and ensure that all can continue to learn. Pupils are taught how to be self-disciplined and to manage their own emotions and behaviour.
- Leaders and teachers continue to develop systems for assessing pupils' learning. In the past, the arrangements for determining pupils' academic starting points have not provided precise enough information. This has made it harder for teachers and leaders to check how much pupils have learned over longer time periods. In addition, while teachers understand that pupils' progress will often happen in very small steps, the assessment systems have previously not provided sufficient detail about these. The information available to sixth-form teachers is more detailed because it includes more external assessment.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are proud of their school and their successes. Those who talked with inspectors said that they enjoy helping each other and carrying out their work in the wider community, for example, when supporting a local food bank.
- Pupils are provided with a wide range of opportunities, which broaden their experiences further. Pupils enthusiastically take part in outdoor activities, including the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, and are proud of their successes in sporting

activities. Pupils work exceptionally well together. An inspector saw close collaboration between pupils of all ages taking part in the school's choir.

- Careers education is tailored to pupils' needs and supports pupils well as they make choices for the next stage in their education, employment and training. Pupils' opportunities for work experience are limited. However, the school fills this gap by creatively planning opportunities for older pupils to help younger ones in lessons and in the running of a local 'pop-up' shop shortly before Christmas.
- The school has a strong culture of valuing individuals equally but celebrating differences. For example, posters which have important messages, like 'The things which make me different are the things that make me me', are common around the school.
- The school ensures that pupils are safe. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire agreed. Specialist staff, including therapists, work as part of the school's team to ensure that pupils' physical and emotional needs are met as well as possible.
- Pupils are taught about how to reduce risks when using computers and mobile phones. The school also provides information to parents about how they can help their children to keep safe when they are out of school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. When infrequent instances of less good behaviour happen, these are dealt with effectively. Teachers and other staff receive training so that they are confident in techniques to reduce stressful situations. If staff need to intervene physically to protect pupils, they follow strict protocols. Such instances are very rare. Leaders analyse any patterns in pupils' behaviour to ensure that they are able to anticipate difficult situations before they arise.
- Instances of bullying are extremely rare. Pupils know how they are expected to behave towards each other. Inspectors heard no instances of pupils using derogatory language towards each other.
- Pupils' attendance is around the average for special schools. Disadvantaged pupils attend as well as others. Pupils' medical needs sometimes mean that their attendance is reduced. The arrangements for transporting pupils to school are slick and well managed. Consequently, punctuality to school is very good. Punctuality throughout the school day is also very good.
- Pupils are helped to develop a strong sense of responsibility as members of the school community and, for many, as members of their local and national community.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Most pupils do not undertake external academic assessment until the sixth form. This means that it is not possible to make simple comparison with outcomes for pupils in most other schools. Leaders are clear that, in addition to helping pupils to gain

academic success, wider outcomes, such as developing their personal and social development and independence, are important. The school has considerable success in supporting this wider progress.

- Leaders and teachers set pupils highly individualised targets against which their progress is checked. If pupils appear to be falling behind these targets, additional teaching or other support is put in place. The school's own records indicate that there are no pronounced differences between the progress of disadvantaged pupils and others.
- The less certain approaches to academic assessment in the past mean that it is hard for leaders to be sure that pupils' progress over the longer term across the range of subjects studied has been as fast as possible.
- Pupils are helped to effectively develop their key skills in reading, writing and mathematics in relation to their starting points.
- For a small number of pupils, their success is such that they are able to transfer back into mainstream school.
- Sixth-form pupils are successful in gaining certificates recognising their basic-skill development and vocational learning.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next steps in their education. Over time, an increasing proportion have accessed college placements and supported employment. Staff have close links with the specialist further education providers who work with pupils after they leave school.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years leaders are passionate and demonstrate a strong desire to make improvements. Their effective work in the early years prepares children well for their move into key stage 1.
- Teachers and other members of staff have high expectations. They generally set work to provide appropriate challenge for pupils with different starting points. However, sometimes, relatively more-able children could be stretched even more. Relationships between children and staff are positive. This gives children confidence to take part in learning. Similarly, engagement with parents is strong, which supports children's transition into the school.
- Leaders have recently introduced a new assessment system. This allows staff to develop a better understanding of what children can already do and what needs to be built up.
- The provision is well resourced, and leaders seek ways to continually improve it, for example, by enhancing the outdoor area. The available funding for pupils, including that to support disadvantaged pupils, is used well.
- Some children make very rapid progress. For example, some children who could say very little at the start of the year have rapidly developed their vocabulary and fluency. The school has recently worked with a consultant to pilot a new system to enhance teaching and support children's learning and good behaviour using rewards. This has

proved highly effective for those children involved. Leaders intend to extend the pilot so that all children can benefit.

- Children typically concentrate properly and are motivated to try hard. They behave well.
- The early years provision reflects the same high standards of safety and welfare as in the rest of the school.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- The sixth form provides very well for students' needs and is further building its success in developing employability skills. It prepares students exceptionally well for the next stages of their lives.
- The leader responsible and staff team are highly enthusiastic and pursue excellence. This creates a very positive ethos. Leaders carefully consider how to best use resources, for example, in creating classes in which students' similar needs can be best met.
- The curriculum is very well matched to students' interests and aptitudes. Teachers and leaders use regular assessment, often linked to externally set programmes, to ensure that students' basic skills in English and mathematics and other interests are developed well. These programmes measure learning which is of a standard below that of GCSE.
- Vocational provision, previously offered in partnership with other institutions, has been reduced as a result of changes in local further education institutions. Leaders are starting to build this provision up again so that students' longer-term needs can be met.
- Staff provide high-quality teaching, which is closely targeted to students' different levels of achievement. This gives students confidence in their studies, and they make rapid gains from their different starting points.
- Much learning is linked to real-world situations. For example, in the on-site provision for horticulture, students grow vegetables and they are taking part in the rebuilding of the school's nature garden. Students were keen to explain to an inspector what they do in horticulture and show off newly planted vegetable and flower seedlings being brought on in the school's polytunnel.
- Very few students leave the school before their courses are complete. This reflects their enjoyment and the great value that they place on their continuing education. Students' attitudes are generally very positive. Where they need continuing support to behave well, this is provided as part of the very effective support that students receive.

School details

Unique reference number	104495
Local authority	Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Inspection number	10022788

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	All-through special school
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	191
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	53
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lexley McTigue
Headteacher	Jamie Campbell (joint acting headteacher) Michelle Slater (joint acting headteacher)
Telephone number	01514 778350
Website	www.bluebellparkknowsley.co.uk
Email address	Bluebell.Park@knowsley.gov.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Bluebell Park School was formed by the amalgamation of Springfield School and the Elms School on 1 September 2014. These schools were previously federated under one governing body. When the federated schools were last inspected by Ofsted, they were judged to be good overall.
- The school has had a vacancy for a substantive headteacher since May 2016. There are currently two joint acting headteachers. Some other senior leadership roles are also interim.
- The chair of the governing body has been in role for roughly two years.

- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan, and most show a significant degree of learning difficulty. Many pupils also have autistic spectrum disorder and, in recent years, pupils' needs have become increasingly severe and complex. There is increasing demand for places at the school.
- Almost all pupils are from a White British background, and there are more boys than girls in the school.
- Around half of the pupils are supported by the pupil premium funding. A small minority of pupils are looked after by the local authority.
- Classes often include pupils of mixed ages.
- The school has sixth-form provision for students up to the age of 19.
- No pupils attend off-site, alternative provision.
- A range of other professionals work in the school for some or all of the week. These include a nursing team, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about the curriculum, governors, results or special educational needs on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across the school in formal lessons and other activities. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at breaks and lunchtimes. An inspector observed pupils' arrival at school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the acting headteachers, other senior leaders, a group of middle leaders and other members of staff. An inspector met formally with a group of pupils, and inspectors spoke to others during lessons and at other times during the school day. An inspector met with governors.
- An inspector held meetings with a representative of the local authority and a consultant who works with the school.
- Inspectors examined pupils' work during lessons.
- Inspectors reviewed documents including school policies, safeguarding information, the school's own evaluation of its effectiveness and improvement planning, minutes of meetings and information about teaching, learning and assessment, and leadership and management.
- Inspectors considered 26 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including 20 additional written comments to the survey questions. They considered 60 responses from staff to an online questionnaire. No responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire to pupils were received.

Inspection team

David Selby, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Elaine White	Ofsted Inspector
Linda Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector

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