

Inspection of Bluebell School Ltd

Gloucester Road, Kidsgrove, Stoke on Trent ST7 1EH

Inspection dates: 29 November to 1 December 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils benefit from an engaging and high-quality education at Bluebell School. Leaders expect pupils to reach their fullest potential and achieve the best possible outcomes. Staff understand deeply each individual's interests, talents and ambitions. They use this information to personalise the curriculum, lessons and opportunities, for all. Pupils thrive and blossom because of the outstanding education the school provides.

Pupils' positive relationships with adults are a striking feature of the school. Leaders pay close attention to ensuring that pupils benefit from high-quality pastoral care. Staff show genuine interest in the pupils they work with. For instance, they deliberately look out for each pupil every morning, to welcome them as they arrive at school. Pupils communicate, smile and engage with adults because they trust them. This helps pupils to feel safe and secure at the school.

Pupils learn about different types of bullying and understand why they are wrong. Adults actively supervise pupils throughout the school day. They eat with them at lunch tables and engage with them at playtimes. Staff deal skilfully with any incidents involving negative behaviour. As a result, the school is a calm and happy place for pupils.

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

Leaders have carefully designed the curriculum to meet the specific special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) of individuals. All pupils learn a broad range of subjects. They follow one of three 'pathways' that help them to study the full curriculum. These 'pathways' are very well planned. Subject leaders have set out the key information they expect pupils to know and remember in each subject. Staff teach this information in a logical order to build pupils' knowledge over time. For instance, in physical education (PE), pupils learn to develop their fine motor skills before learning how to throw and catch.

Adults demonstrate expertise in the way that they teach lessons. They clearly explain facts and concepts. They set tasks that are well matched to pupils' needs and provide useful examples to help pupils work things out. There are three activities in each lesson. These activities include teachers teaching new concepts and information. Adults support pupils with learning specific targets well. And pupils develop independence through practice. The approach is working well. Pupils make very good progress from their start points.

Teachers take great care in checking what pupils know and remember when they begin at the school. This helps them identify pupils' starting points and what they need to learn next. Staff use this information to set precise small-step targets for each learner. Teachers make regular checks on how well pupils achieve these targets. They often recap and revisit the important information they expect pupils to

know. This helps pupils to retain their knowledge and make excellent progress through the curriculum. Pupils are well prepared for next stage of their education by the time they leave the school. All pupils go on to further education or training when they leave the school in Year 11.

Leaders have ensured that reading is a school priority. Pupils who are in the early stages of learning to read have daily phonics lessons. Staff ably teach these lessons. Pupils regularly practise reading in books that are well matched to their abilities. They are enthusiastic about the books they read and the stories they hear. All this means that most pupils become better readers over time.

Staff understand the school's approach to managing behaviour and do so consistently. They use various strategies to help pupils keep on task and focus on lessons. Sometimes pupils' needs do manifest through negative behaviours. Adults act very skilfully and effectively when this happens. This means that situations do not escalate and issues are nipped in the bud. In addition, staff promote positive behaviour through the use of praise and rewards. Pupils respond very positively to this recognition.

The school has a coherent and well-coordinated range of provision that promotes pupils' personal development. At the heart of this provision is a carefully considered 'social skills' programme that all pupils access. Pupils have a weekly lesson that promotes character development and life skills as part of this programme. The programme is enriched through meaningful experiences. For example, some pupils develop useful life skills by completing occupational tasks in a room that has been designed as a model flat.

Leaders ensure that pupils develop an understanding of different faiths and cultures. Pupils enjoy finding out about celebrations such as Diwali. Some pupils have visited a local mosque. They also enjoy participating in charitable works, such as visiting care homes or sending presents to children in other countries. These experiences help pupils to understand the importance of respect and tolerance of others.

Leaders ensure that pupils access impartial careers advice. Staff support pupils to consider a broad range of qualifications and pathways in education and training.

Proprietors, supported ably by a group of 'critical friends', maintain oversight of their key responsibilities. Their positive influence ensures that the school's vision is fully realised. In addition, they oversee the management of the school's statutory duties. For example, they ensure that a safeguarding policy is published on the school's website and that policies comply with the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously. They make the necessary checks on the suitability of staff who work at the school and record these accurately.

Staff are well trained. They are aware of the additional risks that pupils with SEND may face and they know what to do when a pupil needs help. Leaders take swift action when necessary and work well with external agencies.

Pupils take part in many lessons that promote their understanding of how to keep themselves safe. This includes learning about risks associated with using the internet.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	143932
DfE registration number	860/6045
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	10238160
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	113
Proprietor	Bluebell School Ltd
Chair	Sarah Deaville
Headteacher	Kay Banks
Annual fees (day pupils)	£47,025-£79,490
Telephone number	01782 987012
Website	www.bluebellschool.co.uk
Email address	cbarker@bluebellschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 to 28 June 2018

Information about this school

- The school provides education for pupils with special educational needs linked to autism spectrum disorder, learning difficulties or social, emotional mental health (SEMH). All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
- The school's curriculum is designed through three 'pathways'. These are: a cognition and learning pathway, a SEMH pathway and a 'pod' pathway where pupils with the most complex needs receive targeted one-to-one support.
- The school started to provide sixth-form provision from September 2021. There are currently a small number sixth-form students accessing post-16 provision at the school. Inspectors did not report on this aspect of the school's work separately.
- A group of 'critical friends' provide governance and support for school leaders.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- Most pupils travel to and from school by local authority funded transport.
- Seven different local authorities place pupils at the school.
- An unannounced emergency inspection commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) was carried out in July 2019. An additional inspection to check compliance with the independent school standards relevant to providing post-16 provision was carried out in February 2021. The last independent standard inspection of the school took place in June 2018. The overall effectiveness was judged as outstanding.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- 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 his evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with two directors of education, the executive headteacher, the head of school and other school leaders.
- The lead inspector conducted a video call with the chair of the proprietorial board and met with representatives of the 'critical friends' group.
- Inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, PE and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). For each deep dive,

inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The lead inspector reviewed the school's safeguarding policy along with a range of safeguarding information. This work included scrutiny of the school's single central record of checks made on adults. Inspectors checked staff's safeguarding training and spoke to staff about safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including policies, curriculum plans, health and safety records, school action plans and the school's self-evaluation.
- Inspector considered responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments. He also took account of responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- The lead inspector had a tour of the school premises to check that it meets the requirements of the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Jonathan Leonard, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Pamela Matty

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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