

Inspection of Heart of the Forest Community Special School

Speech House, Coleford, Gloucestershire GL16 7EJ

Inspection dates:	25 and 26 February 2025
The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Requires improvement
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

There are warm and respectful working relationships between pupils and staff. Parents and carers are welcomed into school. Communication between the school and its families has greatly improved since the last inspection. Pupils are settled and safe.

The school is working at pace to improve its curriculum to meet the needs of its pupils. Where the curriculum is clearly sequenced and appropriate, pupils engage effectively with their learning and achieve well. However, the quality of education that pupils currently experience varies too much. This means that some pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Pupils take part in a wide range of enrichment activities that support their personal, social and emotional development effectively. Pupils say they have friends to play with and staff who will help them if they need it. Visitors to the school and trips out of school help pupils to learn about the wider world. Pupils are proud to take on class and whole school responsibilities, such as school councillors. These activities contribute to their understanding of fundamental British values. Pupil's talents and interests are nurtured through timetabled sessions such as dance, music and drama. Pupils have the opportunity to complete the Duke of Edinburgh's bronze and silver awards and camp out on the school field. These opportunities contribute to the development of pupils' independence and resilience well.

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

Since the previous inspection, the school's leadership, including governance and staffing, has undergone significant change. This period of instability has now settled. The new staff and leadership team have accurately evaluated the school's strengths and areas for development. They are working tirelessly to implement the necessary changes to improve the school's quality of education.

The school identifies pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively. It uses this information appropriately to inform pupils' end of key stage education, health and care (EHC) plan targets. The school has recently started work to translate pupils' EHC plan targets into manageable next steps. As a result, a few pupils have well-informed and accurate 'personal learning plan' targets in place. These guide staff to help pupils secure their EHC plan outcomes. However, this work is too new to have a positive impact for all pupils.

The school's curriculum from Reception Year to Year 13, focuses on the essential concepts pupils should know and be able to do to ensure their future success. It helps teachers to know what to teach and when. However, some staff do not know the curriculum's content and expectations sufficiently well. Likewise, staff use the school's 'communication toolkit' well in some subjects but not all. Consequently, teacher checks of what pupils know and can do are not accurate. Pupils do not routinely secure new knowledge in these subjects.

There is a sharper focus in the new curriculum on preparing pupils for adulthood. This work begins in the early years, where children explore different jobs in the local community. By the time pupils enter the sixth form, they have opportunities to volunteer and complete work experience. Previously, pupils and their families were not well-prepared and confident to take their next steps. The school has changed these arrangements to begin the planning and transition process much sooner.

Pupils learn to recognise sounds in the environment and to respond appropriately. The school introduces pupils to the joy of books through songs, rhymes and whole-class story times alongside a range of communication aids. Staff ensure pupils have a secure knowledge of the phonics they are learning, before moving on to new sounds. As pupils progress through the phonics programme, staff introduce them to words they will find in the 'real world'. Staff encourage pupils to share books and read for pleasure in school and at home.

The school supports pupils' mental and physical health effectively. Pupils develop social skills such as sharing and turn-taking at snack times. They enjoy special events, for example community walks and leading church services. These activities promote pupils' character development successfully.

The school regularly reviews records of behaviour incidents and attendance. It uses this information to support pupils appropriately. The school works with a range of external professionals and families to help ensure pupils attend school as regularly as possible. Staff support pupils to recognise and manage their feelings and emotions successfully. As a result, pupils typically attend school regularly, settle quickly and are ready to learn.

Governors have a sound understanding of the improvement priorities for the school. They are committed to the ongoing development of the school and recognise that parents are important partners on this improvement journey. There is a clear school development plan that sets out how and when these priorities will be achieved and embedded into practice. Throughout this process, leaders continue to be mindful of supporting staff's well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum and communication strategy are not implemented as leaders intend in some subjects. In these subjects, learning activities do not always secure and deepen pupils' knowledge of important concepts sufficiently well. This means pupils are unable to communicate their existing knowledge, build on prior learning and make connections between concepts taught. The school needs to support staff to ensure that

pupils communicate effectively, know more, can do more and remember more of the school's curriculum.

- The school does not routinely use assessment information to develop and effectively adapt the curriculum to meet some pupils' short-term targets. Consequently, these pupils make insufficient progress through the school's curriculum and towards their individual targets. The school should support staff to use assessment information to develop precise short-term targets and make appropriate adaptations to the curriculum to improve pupils' achievement.

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	134190
Local authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10322236
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
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	143
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	9
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	David Hill
Headteacher	Lucyna Mansfield and Lyn Dance (co-headteachers)
Website	www.heartoftheforestschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	23 and 24 May 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The Heart of the Forest Community Special School is for pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The school recruited a new leadership team, including the co-heads and chair of governors in July 2024.
- Over 20 new members of staff, including nine teachers, have been appointed since September 2024.
- Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Monmouthshire local authorities commission places for pupils at the school.
- 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.

- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the co-headteachers, other school leaders and wider staff. They met with a representative from the local authority and governors including the chair of governors.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and early reading, personal, social, health and economic education, mathematics and physical education. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning, looked at samples of pupils' work, EHC plans and associated documents.
- The inspectors discussed the school's curriculum with leaders and the provision for sixth-form students at the school.
- Although the school is registered to have children in the early years, at the time of the inspection, there were few children on roll in this phase. As such, the inspectors did not to give a grade and report on the provision to avoid identifying individual children.
- The inspectors observed pupils during social times and spoke with pupils and leaders about opportunities for pupils' personal development.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also took into consideration the responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

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