

Inspection of The Observatory School

Bidston Village Road, Bidston, Prenton, Merseyside CH43 7QT

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| Inspection dates: | 14 and 15 January 2025 |
| The quality of education | Good |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Good |
| Personal development | Good |
| Leadership and management | Good |
| Previous inspection grade | Good |

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. Adults develop strong and trusting relationships with pupils. Pupils feel accepted, valued and well cared for. They say that staff help them to make friends, recognise their achievements and help them to learn. The school has high expectations for pupils' achievement. Pupils know that the school wants them to succeed. Most pupils achieve well.

The school harnesses pupils' interests and talents. For example, pupils can take part in sports, the arts and vocational options. The school supports pupils to achieve their ambitions. Visits, including from ex-pupils, inspire pupils to think about their own future aspirational career choices.

Pupils learn about their emotions and understand how this can affect their behaviour. The school helps pupils to learn the strategies they need to regulate their behaviour. Over time, pupils learn to manage their behaviour well.

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

The school has expanded significantly since the previous inspection. The school now has three distinct bases to accommodate the different age groups and special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) of the pupils in school. The school has worked tirelessly to ensure that the new bases are well-equipped, welcoming and ready for pupils.

The school's curriculum is ambitious. Pupils achieve nationally recognised qualifications including entry levels, functional skills and GCSEs. The curriculum has been well-thought through to allow pupils to build their knowledge and skills over time. However, due to the intake of new pupils, some curriculums need further refinement to ensure that all pupils can learn well.

Reading is a high priority across the school. A range of checks on learning allows staff to identify which pupils need support and intervention. This helps pupils to work on any gaps in their learning. Pupils quickly gain the knowledge and skills they need to become confident and fluent readers. The school ensures that pupils develop a love of reading.

Across other subject areas, the school uses checks on pupils' learning well to design future teaching. Staff know pupils' needs well and select topics and resources that they know will interest pupils and engage them in their learning.

Some pupils do not attend school regularly enough. The school works closely with pupils, parents and carers, to build trust and strong relationships. It identifies any barriers to pupils' attendance effectively. Pupils who are often returning to education attend well.

The school has systems in place to support pupils to manage their behaviours. Most staff and pupils are aware of these and they are followed consistently well. As pupils join the school there can be some disruption to learning as pupils settle into their new learning environment.

The school puts personal development at the front and centre of its offer for pupils. For example, pupils learn and develop an awareness of mental health. During social times, pupils enjoy playing football with staff. Lunch clubs help pupils to socialise and learn how to work with others. Pupils learn about healthy, respectful relationships. They also learn about different cultures and religions which helps them to understand and respect those with different faiths and beliefs. This work ensures that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

Pupils have an independent careers adviser who offers advice and guidance. Pupils are provided with opportunities to visit post-16 providers and attend careers events. The work that the school does ensures that pupils are ready for the transition into further education, training or work.

The school, alongside the governing body, has ensured that, during the challenges of the rapid expansion, its vision and ethos has been maintained. It continues to strive to give all pupils the best possible education.

Staff feel that leaders are approachable and recognise the importance of their well-being. The school considers ways to improve staff workload and their work-life balance. Staff value this approach.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the curriculum does not meet the needs of all pupils. In these subjects, pupils do not learn or achieve as well as they could. The school should evaluate where refinements need to be made to subject curriculums to ensure that they meet the needs of all learners.
- The school has not ensured that its policies and practices have been applied consistently during a period of rapid expansion. This has impacted on some pupils' behaviour and has contributed to some disruption to learning. The school should ensure that its policies are implemented effectively and consistently across all school sites to help pupils to learn the curriculum well and without interruption.

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

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| Unique reference number | 127715 |
| Local authority | Wirral |
| Inspection number | 10337676 |
| Type of school | All-through Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 7 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 170 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Jane Owens MBE FRSA |
| Headteacher | Gregory Chiswell |
| Website | www.theobservatoryschool.wirral.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 14 March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection the school has opened an additional two bases. The number of pupils on roll has increased. The new bases are located within a three-mile radius from the main school.
- The school uses six unregistered providers of alternative provision.
- All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, senior school leaders and subject leaders. Inspectors spoke to members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair. An inspector also spoke to the independent school improvement partner and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and physical education (PE). For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupil's work. An inspector also listened to some pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects and visited some pupils in their alternative provision.
- 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 reviewed a range of documents, including policies and analysis of pupils' behaviour and attitudes.
- Inspectors spoke to some pupils and staff about the school. They also observed pupils' behaviour during lunch and breaktimes.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents expressed through Ofsted's Parent View, including the free-text responses.

Inspection team

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|------------------------------|------------------|
| Julie Bather, lead inspector | Ofsted Inspector |
| Louise Atkin | Ofsted Inspector |
| Lindy Griffiths | Ofsted Inspector |

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