

The Forest School

Park Lane, Knaresborough, North Yorkshire, HG5 0DQ

Inspection dates 10–11 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Early years provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The highly effective teamwork, caring and nurturing ethos, together with a shared vision, makes The Forest School a very happy and successful school where pupils love to be.
- The headteacher leads the school with total dedication. He has ensured that standards have risen in all aspects of the schools' work so that the quality of education is outstanding overall.
- Senior and middle leaders use a wide range of skills to great effect to meet the diverse needs of the pupils. As a result, pupils' achievement is outstanding.
- The quality of teaching has improved to outstanding since the previous inspection. This is due to the continuous professional development of staff and frequent checks on the quality of teaching by leaders and managers.
- Teachers are very skilled in the different communication and learning needs of their pupils. They plan lessons which ensure all pupils make the best possible progress they can in reading, writing, mathematics and other subjects.
- The introduction of phonics (the sounds letters make) across the school has improved pupils' ability to read and write. However, not all support staff have yet received training to support the learning of phonics accurately.
- A marking policy has been introduced and is used well across most subjects. However, marking of the work of pupils of lower ability does not always help them to understand how well they are doing.
- The outstanding early years provision ensures children get off to an excellent start.
- Parents are right to have every confidence that the school keeps their children safe. They are understandably delighted by the progress their children make in their personal, social and communication skills and how they grow in confidence and self-esteem.
- Parents are extremely appreciative of the excellent care, guidance and support provided both to their children and to themselves.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons, around the school and in the community is exemplary. Consistent behaviour management enables those who have occasional difficulties to quickly calm and rejoin activities.
- The curriculum is outstanding, providing rich opportunities for pupils to develop the skills they will need in their future lives. The wide range of outdoor activities are enjoyed by all. These sometimes lead to accreditation, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, and to further education courses when pupils leave school.
- Staff share their expertise in working with pupils with autism through the work of the outreach team into mainstream schools. This work is highly regarded by schools and parents.
- Governors provide an outstanding level of support and challenge to the school. They have a detailed knowledge of the work of the school through their subject and aspect links and frequent visits.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons across the school in a range of subjects. Some lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work, talked to pupils informally around the school and met with groups of pupils to discuss their views on their learning and on behaviour and safety in the school.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders and members of the governing body.
- The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspectors reviewed information in documents including those relating to safeguarding, pupils' progress, accreditation, school improvement, behaviour management and the performance management of staff.
- Inspectors took account of the 40 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), to three letters sent in by parents and a number of parent phone calls to the inspection contractor. The 33 staff questionnaires returned were also considered.

Inspection team

Hilary Ward, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Claire Patton

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Forest School provides for pupils aged three to 16 with a range of complex disabilities and special educational needs including autism spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, speech language and communication needs and physical disabilities. A few pupils have sensory impairments in addition to their learning difficulties. Many pupils have complex combinations of special educational needs and all have a statement of special educational needs or education, care and health plans.
- Children who attend the early years provision may attend full time or part time according to their individual needs.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils, those eligible for the additional pupil premium funding, is above average. This is additional government funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The large majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- Pupils come from across North Yorkshire, with many travelling long distances to attend the school. Pupils are frequently admitted at other than the usual times, usually transferring from mainstream primary and secondary schools.
- The school makes use of work experience placements as appropriate for individual pupils. There were no pupils on placement at the time of the inspection.
- The local authority commissions the school to provide outreach advice and guidance for pupils with autism attending mainstream schools.
- Two senior members of staff are specialist leaders in education.
- Two other members of staff are regional trainers in a commercial signing system and positive behaviour management.
- The school is a specialist college for communication and interaction. It is a strategic partner in the HART (Harrogate and Rural Teaching) Alliance, together with one secondary school and approximately 50 primary schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sustain the outstanding teaching by:
 - developing the skills of teaching assistants to support the use of phonics in pupils' reading and writing
 - ensuring the consistent use of marking in ways which inform all pupils, especially those of lower ability, how well they are doing and how to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Governors, staff and parents share the view that the headteacher provides outstanding leadership to the school and inspectors agree with this. Team work across all aspects of leadership and management, led by the headteacher, is exceptional. There is a shared commitment from all staff to ensuring the highest possible standards, and best possible provision and outcomes, for all pupils. As a result, standards have risen so that this is an outstandingly effective school.
- Middle leaders make an excellent contribution to school improvement. They are given the freedom to make recommendations and take actions based on a thorough understanding of the excellent data which informs them about pupil performance in their subject and aspect areas. This data is also scrutinised regularly by senior managers and governors in order to ensure that no pupil is failing to make the progress expected of them. Swift action is taken when necessary.
- All leaders, including governors, contribute well to the evaluation of teaching and learning through lesson observations. Thorough checks are also made on pupils' work in their books and on their progress through assessment, reviews of lesson planning and by frequent learning walks. As a result, there is an understanding of best practice which is shared with all staff so that the quality of teaching is outstanding overall and any underperformance is dealt with very quickly. Performance management of teachers is based securely on national standards and their professional development is always carefully linked to the needs of the school and its pupils.
- Pupils are as well prepared as they can be for life after school. This is through the frequent trips they make to the local and wider community, learning to use facilities such as the local swimming pool, climbing wall, gymnastic facilities, allotment, library and shops. Careers guidance is provided by an external advisor as well as through work-related learning, life skills lessons and work placements. Pupils are offered work experience placements where this is appropriate for the individual and these are carefully risk-assessed and supported by school staff.
- Pupils follow a curriculum which is exciting and very well matched to their needs and interests in spite of the restricted space in the building. Equality of opportunity is fundamental to all that happens in the school. National curriculum subjects are well adapted to match individual and group needs and abilities. As pupils move through the school, there is an increasing focus on gaining meaningful independence skills and ensuring that pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They learn British moral values of tolerance, respect and the rule of law in frequent theme days about different religions, through trips into the community or a visit to the Houses of Parliament.
- The school provides for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness exceptionally well through all aspects of the curriculum. Pupils are very supportive of each other and are well prepared for their future lives as confident and responsible citizens. For example, they take part in enterprise projects to fundraise for good causes, often participating with and competing against students from local mainstream schools. Pupils enjoy many theme days and lessons which help them to understand, respect and not to discriminate about different lifestyles and religions and the differences of others.
- Additional government funding for disadvantaged pupils is used extremely effectively to ensure eligible pupils have equal access to activities such as trips, residentials and the Duke of Edinburgh award. The school buys in a counselling service and additional support for pupils in English and mathematics. As a result, there is no gap in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school.
- Additional primary sports funding is used particularly well to develop the range of sports available for pupils to try, to provide competition with other schools and to develop the skills of staff in delivering sport and physical education. The specialist physical education teacher offers alternative activities, such as a gymnastics club, and brings in other specialists, such as a dance teacher. As a result, provision for sport is very strong in the school and accessible to all pupils, regardless of ability or disability.
- The school has strong links with the local authority. A special educational needs adviser visits the school on a regular basis to work with leaders to check standards and provide support to the governing body for the headteacher's performance management. The work of the school is held in high esteem by the local authority who commission four members of staff to provide outreach services for pupils with autism attending mainstream schools.
- The Forest School shares its special educational needs expertise with other schools in the HART Alliance, providing training courses and enabling visits by staff from partner schools. The willingness to continually look outwards contributes significantly to the capacity for continuing school improvement.
- Safeguarding procedures are exemplary, with accurate record keeping and rigorous systems in place.
- Partnership with parents is exceptional. Parents were very keen to express the positive difference the

school has made in the lives of their children and their appreciation of the valuable support provided by staff to both children and their parents. As parents come from a wide catchment area, many are particularly grateful for the effort staff go to bring parent consultation events to other towns to make it easier for them to attend. As one parent expressed it, 'We have numerous examples of how staff have gone above and beyond what could normally be expected.' Parents feel very involved and regularly informed about what is happening at school and how best to help their children.

■ The governance of the school:

- The governing body is highly effective, providing exceptional support and challenge to the school. Governors ensure that pupils' well-being is at the heart of all that the school does. They also share the vision and strong commitment to making sure that pupils can achieve their very best academically and in their personal development. Governors have a very clear understanding of pupils' achievement, scrutinising data and asking challenging questions when necessary.
- All governors have a link into school, are frequent visitors and have a sound knowledge of the work of the school at first hand. They are extremely well informed about the quality of teaching and learning, and ensure that pay increases are linked to consistently good performance.
- The governing body keeps a close check on the use of pupil premium and primary sports funding and requests information about the impact of their use. Governors attend training sessions in school and in the local authority to be sure they meet their statutory requirements for safeguarding and to keep themselves up to date with new developments in the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils quickly settle into the calm, nurturing environment, often after difficult experiences in previous settings. Many parents report that their child's life is transformed after joining The Forest School.
- Pupils say they love school and wish they could stay there for longer. They feel valued and respected and, in turn, learn to value and respect each other and their differences. Attendance levels are exceptionally high.
- Pupils are very attentive in lessons. They engage willingly in the practical activities which help them to learn. They especially enjoy the outdoor curriculum which is a feature of the school. Pupils enjoy walks, visits, working on the allotment and residential trips. They learn how to behave in and contribute to life in the community. For example, pupils joined with the community in Knaresborough to make bunting, decorate their bicycles and trikes, and cheer on competitors when the Tour de France came through their town last year.
- Strengths in sport, music, drama and dance, religious education and personal, social and health education help pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and their understanding of British moral values exceptionally well.
- Those pupils who occasionally experience behaviour difficulties related to their disabilities and special educational needs are managed highly effectively so that disruptions to learning are very rare.
- Pupils understand the reward system well and enjoy working for certificates and other rewards which are presented at the weekly assemblies. They are proud of their own and others' achievements. One pupil, a very reluctant swimmer, was so thrilled with himself when he swam on his back unsupported that he simply had to tell the inspector and asserted: 'Next week I'm going to swim on my front too.'

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Parents are right to be very confident that their children are safe and happy in school. This is because safeguarding is given the highest priority.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are very strong and help pupils to feel at ease and ready to learn. Pupils say they are confident to share their views and any worries with trusted adults. They know that their concerns will be quickly responded to. For this reason, pupils do not believe that there is any bullying in school.
- Pupils develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in all subjects taught in the school and local environment. As far as it is possible, pupils are supported to understand how to stay safe on the internet and how to avoid cyber bullying, for instance, by staff's immediate response to a pupils' concern about inappropriate texting when he raised it in a lesson. The school has well-advanced plans to provide workshops to parents on cyber safety.

- Work experience placements are carefully risk-assessed to meet the behavioural and learning needs of individual pupils and are monitored closely to ensure they are safe.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The impact of the quality of teaching over time is outstanding and enables pupils to make outstanding progress in their academic development and in their personal and social skills.
- The teaching of mathematics is particularly strong across the school. Pupils engage in activities which are well matched to individual and group needs to ensure their progress from their low starting points is outstanding. Older pupils learn how to use their mathematical skills in practical situations. For example, in a Key Stage 4 lesson, more-able pupils judged the capacity and value of various shapes and sizes of containers they might find in a supermarket. In a Key Stage 3 lesson, lower-ability pupils understood the value of different weights by measuring ingredients to make a cake. They understood 'more and less' and 'bigger and smaller' in a very practical way.
- The teaching of English is underpinned by the communication-rich environment. All staff consistently use a range of communication to ensure pupils understand what is expected of them and to help them respond to questioning. Expectations for what pupils can achieve are very high.
- The introduction of a phonics programme at each key stage has helped pupils to improve their reading and writing. A daily reading activity helps all pupils to develop their basic reading ability and makes sure that the most-able pupils are developing higher level skills, such as comprehension of different texts. Further work is planned to develop the skills of teaching assistants to deliver the phonics programmes even more effectively.
- A marking policy has been introduced and is generally used well across the school. It does not always help all pupils, especially those of lower ability, to understand how well they are doing and how they might improve their work.
- Support from teaching assistants is of high quality and team work across the school is highly effective in helping pupils to learn. Senior leaders have invested in the employment of specialist assistants to support communication and interaction, and in the appointment of care assistants so that education assistants can focus on support in the classroom.
- All pupils are provided with homework from a young age. Mathematics homework, spelling and one other piece of English homework is given weekly and parents are provided with advice on how to help their children learn at home.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- All pupils join with levels of attainment which are well below those typical for their age due to their disabilities and special educational needs. Pupils achieve extremely, well regardless of the nature of their needs.
- Almost all pupils make at least good or better progress in mathematics, English and science. For some, the progress is remarkable, especially after they first join the school, because their needs are well understood and well met. On the occasions when pupils do not make the progress expected of them, reasons are explored and interventions put in place to get them quickly back on track.
- Progress in communication is a particular strength because all staff use sign, symbols and technological aids very consistently across all subjects to meet the needs of individuals and groups of pupils exceptionally well. Once pupils feel able to communicate their needs and wishes, and feel that they are understood, they can begin to make rapid progress in other areas.
- Pupils' achievements in English, especially at Key Stage 3, have improved through a 'back to basics' approach. This has ensured that pupils are successfully developing the reading and writing skills they will need for their future lives and are practising them across all subjects.
- Pupils do particularly well in mathematics and science, where staff have high expectations for what pupils can achieve. Both subjects raise pupils' awareness of how subject skills can be used in real life and extend their knowledge and understanding of the world. For example, in Key Stage 4 science, pupils experienced the awe, wonder and horror of discovering how much sugar there was in a can of regular cola drink compared to a diet version when they boiled it down.
- The most-able pupils are challenged well. All pupils leave the school with awards which reflect their different skills and abilities. Although a few of the most-able pupils have been able to gain GCSEs in art, science and mathematics in the recent past, the increasing complexity of pupils' disabilities and special

educational needs means this is becoming more difficult. However, the school has ensured alternative accreditation routes are offered to enable all pupils to enjoy success in achieving external and internal awards.

- Pupils in Year 11 undertake work experience placements wherever appropriate, learning new skills in settings such as the café at Henshaws College or the walled garden in Ripon. These placements are always carefully risk assessed and often supported by The Forest School staff. All pupils move into continuing education placements on leaving school and these are sometimes supported by a partnership of other providers with The Forest School.
- The school's focus on the needs of every individual pupil ensures that disadvantaged pupils achieve at least as well as other pupils in the school because excellent support is provided to any pupil failing to make sufficient progress in any area of work. The nature of pupils' learning difficulties and disabilities, together with the small group sizes, make it inappropriate to compare the attainment of The Forest School pupils at the end of Year 6 and Year 11 against that of all pupils nationally.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in their personal and social development. The exciting curriculum provides many challenging and rewarding experiences in school and in the many outdoor activities, such as Woodland Adventure and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Pupils build their self-esteem and confidence through activities, such as donkey riding for children and younger pupils, and sailing, canoeing and wall climbing for older pupils.

Early years provision

is outstanding

- The quality of teaching in early years is outstanding. Children make excellent progress, usually from very low starting points, because staff plan activities which engage and motivate them to want to learn, share and take part. They quickly develop the personal and social skills that form the springboard for their future learning and their achievement is outstanding.
- Excellent planning for admission is undertaken through close partnership with parents and, where appropriate, with prior settings. As a result, children settle quickly because they have usually visited the setting several times and staff have a very clear view of their individual needs and abilities.
- The early years provision is led and managed exceptionally well. The early years teacher has clear, high aspirations for the children. She plans and checks their small steps of progress extremely carefully with the class team. Teamwork is of the essence in the early years, with a shared understanding of targets and consistent management of the children.
- The environment of the early years setting is stimulating and friendly. The outdoor area holds an array of colourful toys and equipment and, although small and rather restricted, the indoor space is well planned to develop all aspects of children's learning extremely well.
- Children make particularly rapid progress in their communication and in their personal and social skills during activities such as snack time and when they go out of school swimming, donkey riding or on visits to the animal centre.
- Children are kept very safe and secure in early years. They begin to learn excellent behaviour which supports outstanding learning. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is threaded through all activities and children are prepared extremely well to move into Year 1.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	121775
Local authority	North Yorkshire
Inspection number	449487

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	108
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tim Mottram
Headteacher	Peter Hewitt
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2011
Telephone number	01423 864583
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