

Inspection of St John's School

Austin Canons, Bedford Road, Kempston, Bedford, Bedfordshire MK42 8AA

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 September 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Insufficient evidence
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The headteacher of this school is Charlotte Wood. The school is part of Bedford Inclusive Learning Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for the running of the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Catherine Assink, chaired by Kevin Green.

What is it like to attend this school?

Calm and clear routines help pupils to settle as soon as they arrive at school each morning. Every pupil receives a warm greeting from the adult who knows them best. Pupils form strong and nurturing relationships with staff. Pupils are safe and secure. They express their enjoyment of school using words such as 'happy' and 'friendly'.

Pupils want to learn. Everyone shares the same high aspirations to work hard and try their best. This helps to make the school a harmonious place. Pupils have broad smiles and express wonder and delight when they are successful in class.

The school understands that communication is key in helping pupils to share their feelings. Positive approaches used by staff help pupils to understand their behaviours. Pupils show care and respect for one another and behave well in and out of class. At times, some pupils find it difficult to manage their emotions. These times are well managed by staff.

Pupils who attend St. John's have profound and multiple learning and health difficulties. Staff work closely with therapists to provide excellent care for pupils. Bespoke programmes of therapy support are woven into pupils' daily routines. This ensures that pupils' range of needs are well met.

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

There has been a renewed focus on the plans for the curriculum. The school's curriculum make use of four pathways. Each provides an appropriate provision to meet the range of pupils' complex needs. The pathways identify the important information pupils need to build their learning in order. This is through areas of learning or different subjects. Pupils receive a broad and ambitious curriculum. There is still some work to further refine the curriculum. This is to ensure that it includes and outlines the precise steps of learning so that pupils with complex needs fully secure what they need to know.

The golden thread of 'preparation for the future' is woven through the curriculum. Across all key stages, pupils have opportunities to place learning in real-life contexts. It means pupils successfully achieve their targets drawn from their education, health and care plans. In the sixth-form, students develop this knowledge through a life skills curriculum. They achieve national qualifications such as functional skills.

Teachers make skilful use of different communication approaches when teaching. Their subject knowledge is secure. However, not all staff deliver the curriculum equally well. In a few subjects, the strategies teachers use are less effective. Pupils are not provided enough time to practise and apply their learning, preventing them from learning as well as they should.

Staff have a secure knowledge of what each pupil needs to learn. Adults work well together as teams to share information and make careful checks of pupils' progress. Teachers use this information effectively when planning pupils' next steps. Learning to read is important at St. John's. Pupils learn phonics as soon as they are ready. Staff are well trained to deliver the school's chosen programme. All pupils enjoy hearing stories and reading books. A wide selection of reading materials and weekly visits to the library foster a pleasure of reading.

Pupils behave well. They show tolerance and respect for each other. Pupils build trusting relationships with adults. They know that there is always someone on hand to help. If they have concerns, pupils know how to use the 'safe circle' to get the support they need.

Pupils enjoy a variety of opportunities to enrich their learning and to prepare them for adulthood. Regular visits to shops, places of worship and the library promotes a better understanding of their community. The school council meets regularly. They learn to share ideas about how to improve the school.

Work is ongoing to strengthen the careers programme. Increased participation by local providers, as well as on-site work experience is now taking place. Pupils build their knowledge of work through jobs and roles they perform around the school.

Trustees have taken decisive action to arrest the decline in the school's performance. New leaders at all levels are driving school improvement with renewed vigour. Staff welcome the changes. They consider there is a greater receptiveness to management of their workload and 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)

- In a few areas of the curriculum, the plans do not provide sufficient detail to support the building of learning for pupils with complex needs. This means that pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. Leaders should ensure that curriculum plans are more precise and that all teachers know how to use the programmes effectively in order to plan pupils' learning well.
- In a few subjects, teachers do not make appropriate pedagogical choices to teach the curriculum well. This means that pupils needs are not well met, and they do not learn the curriculum as intended. Leaders must ensure that all teachers receive training to teach well so that pupils make the best progress of which they are capable.

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	137469
Local authority	Bedford
Inspection number	10306110
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	179
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Kevin Green
Headteacher	Charlotte Wood
Website	www.st-johns-school.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 June 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St John’s School provides education for pupils with severe and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- St John’s School is located on two sites: The St John’s site caters for pupils from early years to key stage 4. The post-16 provision is located at Kempston Academy.
- The headteacher took up her post in March 2023. The deputy headteacher took up her role in September 2022.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school is registered to admit children into the early years. At the time of this inspection, there were no children of early years age enrolled on the school register.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement 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 headteacher, other senior leaders, teachers and other support staff.
- Inspectors met with several groups of pupils. Inspectors also observed pupils during breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- An inspector met with three trustees including the chair of trustees, the chair of the local governing body, the chief executive officer from the trustees and the director of operations and finance. The clerk to the trustees and governors also attended the meeting.
- An inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of Bedford Borough Learning Services.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading and communication, mathematics, personal, social, health and economic education, geography and computing. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of work.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's arrangements for safeguarding and met the designated school leaders for safeguarding. They also reviewed policies and procedures and reviewed the safeguarding checks made on staff when they are recruited.
- Inspectors examined a range of school documents, including curriculum plans and record-keeping for behaviour management, exclusions and attendance.
- There were no responses made to the surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Lesley Stevens	Ofsted Inspector
Adam Cooke	His Majesty's Inspector

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