

Inspection of Nicol Mere School

Roman Road, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Wigan, Lancashire WN4 8DF

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 November 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Early years provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since June 2010.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are immensely proud and happy to attend this exceptional school. They positively bask in the care and guidance that the school provides. Pupils relish the vast array of events, trips and activities on offer. Classrooms are a hive of activity, and pupils love to come to school each day.

The school's aspirations for pupils are exceptionally high, and nothing but the best will do. Pupils live up to these expectations and become confident and highly articulate learners. Across the school, including in the early years, pupils make exceptional progress through the curriculum. They are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Their manners are impeccable. This begins in Reception, where children listen with rapt concentration and delight in all of the wonderful activities that the school provides.

Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), make an outstanding contribution to their school and wider community. They perform their many leadership roles with great diligence and pride.

Parents and carers who shared their views with inspectors hold the school in high regard. They feel fortunate to be part of the 'Nicol Mere family'.

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

The school has meticulously crafted a vibrant and extremely ambitious learning journey, which broadens pupils' horizons and expands their minds. The key knowledge that pupils will learn from the beginning of early years to the end of Year 6 is identified with absolute precision and clarity. The school makes sure that pupils, including those with SEND, learn new content in a logical way that enables them to build firm foundations for future learning.

Highly trained staff deliver the curriculum with expertise and enthusiasm. Their passion for learning is infectious. They expertly design learning activities that support pupils to make strong connections between what they know already and new curriculum content. Pupils develop detailed knowledge across all areas of the curriculum. Their ability to discuss their learning with confidence and maturity is impressive.

Teachers constantly probe what pupils know and understand of current and past learning. They check that pupils have retained this knowledge and are able to apply it to a wide range of contexts. Staff use assessment information extremely well to rapidly address any misconceptions that pupils may have and to shape their next steps in learning.

The school leaves no stone unturned in its quest to ignite pupils' enthusiasm and passion for reading and books. Reading sits at the heart of the school's curriculum. For example, staff and pupils look forward to special days where they celebrate famous authors. They enjoy dressing up as their favourite characters and sharing stories and books with each other.

Children in the Reception classes get off to a flying start with their reading. Staff grasp every opportunity to develop children's language skills and to introduce them to new vocabulary. Older pupils show exceptionally positive attitudes to reading. They have an impressive knowledge of a wide variety of books and authors from a diverse range of backgrounds.

The school's phonics programme is delivered with absolute fidelity by all staff across the school. Pupils read books that are expertly matched to the sounds that they know. Any pupils who struggle to learn new sounds are rapidly spotted and provided with highly effective and timely support. As a result, pupils quickly begin to read books with confidence and accuracy.

Staff accurately identify the additional needs of pupils with SEND without delay. They use this information to skilfully scaffold learning to enable these pupils to master the same curriculum content as their peers. Pupils with SEND achieve exceptionally well. They are valued members of the school community. Parents of pupils with SEND who shared their views with the inspection team were full of praise for the work that the school does to support their children.

Pupils' conduct in lessons and at breaktimes is impeccable. Pupils approach their work with great diligence and pride. Relationships between staff and pupils are exceptionally strong. Pupils cannot praise their teachers highly enough.

The programme to promote pupils' personal development is exemplary. Pupils benefit from an abundance of opportunities to enhance their learning beyond the academic curriculum. For example, pupils learn how important it is to budget and to be financially aware. They take part in numerous fundraising events to raise money for worthy causes. Pupils also show a deep understanding of fundamental British values such as democracy and mutual respect.

Pupils learn in detail about how to look after their physical health and emotional well-being. They enjoy learning how to prepare a range of healthy dishes such as fruit kebabs and smoothies, as well as making nutritious soups and healthy meals. Pupils also enjoy working as mental health champions to help any pupils who may need some emotional support. These wide and varied experiences help pupils to be respectful and active citizens and to be fully prepared for life in modern Britain.

Governors, leaders and staff share a strong moral purpose: to ensure that the school is the best it can be. Governors use their wide range of relevant skills and knowledge to ask probing questions and hold leaders to account for the performance of the school. Staff are incredibly proud to work at such a special

school. They appreciate the decisions that the school has made, such as changing the marking policy, to actively reduce their workload and increase their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	106430
Local authority	Wigan
Inspection number	10294249
Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	420
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Sally Gratton (acting)
Headteacher	Stephanie Swift
Website	www.nicolmere.wigan.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	15 and 16 June 2010

Information about this school

- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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 this into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, geography, art and design, and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors met with leaders, discussed curriculums, visited a sample of lessons, met with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and reviewed samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also observed pupils from Years 1 to 3 read to a familiar adult.

- Inspectors considered other subjects in the school's curriculum. They talked to the leaders of these subjects. Inspectors also spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work in these subjects.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, other leaders and staff.
- The lead inspector met with governors, including the acting chair of the governing body. Inspectors spoke with a representative of the local authority and the school's improvement partner.
- Inspectors spoke with different groups of pupils to gather their views of the school and held discussions about their behaviour and learning. They also observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at playtime.
- Inspectors spoke with parents as they dropped their children off at school. Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils or for staff.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 met with those responsible for safeguarding at the school. They scrutinised a range of documentation in relation to safeguarding. They also spoke with governors, staff, parents and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation provided by school leaders and staff. This included the school's priority action plan, minutes of governing body meetings, headteacher reports and the school's self-evaluation document.

Inspection team

Louise McArdle, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Debbie Withey	Ofsted Inspector
Gary Bevin	Ofsted Inspector

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