

Samuel Pepys School

Cromwell Road, St Neots, Cambridgeshire PE19 2EZ

Inspection dates

26–27 March 2019

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Leaders continually focus on adapting and improving the provision so that they can better meet pupils' often complex needs. Any improvements are quickly identified and addressed.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are outstanding. Teachers' high expectations enable pupils to flourish.
- Outstanding leadership focuses on developing staff at all levels, so they progress. Some senior leaders started as teaching assistants.
- Children in the early years make significant gains across all areas. Staff have a deep understanding of their needs.
- Parents and carers are fully involved in their children's development. They are universally positive. All would recommend the school to other parents.
- Staff are determined to improve pupils' lives. They are patient, sensitive and understanding of pupils' requirements.
- Pupils feel safe, happy and well cared for. It is easy to see why.
- Leaders know communication skills are pivotal in pupils' development. Staff are trained in a range of techniques to help pupils progress.
- Governors play a full and active part in the life of the school. They have been a driving force on the school's journey to outstanding.
- Pupils' strengths, needs and outcomes are clear in their education, health and care (EHC) plans. They reflect the most urgent priorities.
- Leaders and governors adapt the curriculum to focus on concepts and functional learning that help pupils to develop useful skills for life.
- The achievement of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is maximised through staff's high expectations.
- Sixth-form students are prepared effectively for the next stage of their lives. All students in the past three years have progressed to education or training.
- Pupils develop exceptionally well socially, emotionally, physically and academically through judicious therapeutic interventions.
- Pupils are a credit to the school. They are welcoming, polite and keen to learn.
- Teachers plan exciting activities, focusing on EHC plan targets, which enable pupils to make outstanding progress from their starting points.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

Inspectors identified no specific priorities for improvement. Leaders' careful self-review and commitment to the continuous professional development of staff give confidence that the school will continue to go from strength to strength.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher, supported extremely well by other senior leaders and governors, provides outstanding leadership. Staff are empowered to continually push the boundaries on what can be achieved in this wonderful school.
- Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. One parental comment, which typified that of many others, said: 'I had high expectations and they have exceeded all my expectations and more. My daughter is thriving at the school. She has progressed physically, emotionally and mentally. I could not say a single thing they need to do to improve the school because in my eyes they go above and beyond for every child in that school.'
- Leaders' clear vision to continually evaluate and improve what they do has created an outstanding school. Over time, they have added a swing room, literacy lounge, an interactive multi-sensory room, fitness suite, gardening club and forest school to name but a few. Pupils benefit greatly from these facilities, helping them to achieve their goals in life.
- This is a calm and happy place where pupils are helped to achieve their potential. Staff have a detailed knowledge of every pupil that helps them to carefully tailor purposeful activities. Pupils make the small steps that are pivotal in helping them to achieve their hopes and ambitions, which are not limited by their complex conditions. As one parent commented, 'My daughter does things that I never thought would be possible.'
- Additional funding is spent judiciously. Leaders directly employ additional occupational and speech and language therapists, alongside their music, play, rebound, and person-centred art therapists. These interventions are crucial in meeting pupils' individual needs. Leaders evaluate their impact precisely and can evidence the progress seen in pupils' emotional well-being, resilience and physical development.
- Time, care and close work with parents ensure that the targets in EHC plans carefully reflect pupils' most pressing priorities. Staff are acutely aware of the need to get the plans right to make sure that everything they do is in the best interests of the pupils. The forest school helps pupils to develop their self-esteem through highly effective hands-on learning experiences in a natural environment.
- Leaders have carefully sequenced the curriculum. A mixture of research-based school improvement work and activities with other schools gives leaders a clarity about what pupils need to know and do. The curriculum and provision are then moulded to help pupils achieve extremely well. The 'My plan, My targets, My progress' approach ensures that pupils continually focus on what helps them most.
- Professional development is highly effective at all levels. Staff benefit from internal and external training that improves provision across the piece. The clear processes in place to develop staff ensure that many leaders are 'home grown'.
- Staff are proud to work at the school. They are clear about their responsibilities and their role in driving improvements. Premises staff meet leaders and governors regularly to ensure that the facilities are continually updated to meet pupils' changing needs. Teaching assistants are helped to achieve additional qualifications so they can better

support pupils.

- Leaders are outward looking. As a strategic partner in the teaching school alliance and their involvement in initial teacher training help to keep them at the forefront of current practice. By sharing their expertise with other schools, they provide effective support to help improve provision more widely.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is threaded through the curriculum. Leaders provide many well-supported opportunities for pupils to engage with the local community and to learn about how their actions affect others.

Governance of the school

- Governors have been instrumental in helping to secure the improvements seen since the previous inspection. They willingly spend time in school to see pupils learning. They attend socials, film viewings and assemblies, and complete monitoring activities linked to standards, safeguarding, premises and health and safety.
- Governors' minutes from their meetings show that they both challenge and support leaders. They have overseen improvements in the provision so that pupils with complex needs can benefit from excellent facilities and essential therapies. The impact on families is literally life-changing.
- Governors have an in-depth and detailed knowledge of the school. They provide leaders with effective support, alongside robust challenge. They bring a wealth of different skills and valuable experiences to their roles. They have an accurate view of the school's effectiveness.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There are clear processes in place to ensure that pupils remain safe. Comprehensive and detailed risk assessments ensure safe practice to mitigate risks to pupils' safety.
- Staff are well trained. They are vigilant and log any concerns they have for pupils' safety. Leaders act quickly upon any concerns staff raise and work effectively with external agencies. Pupils and families now benefit from additional support as a result of the school's actions.
- Safeguarding is built into everyday activities, and pupils know how to use their 'I am a vulnerable young adult card' should they get into difficulty.
- The comprehensive e-safety programme deals with issues where pupils may be particularly vulnerable. Recent topics include online grooming, sexting and online sexual harassment. Pupils are confident that they know what to do to stay safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers use their in-depth knowledge to plan interesting and enjoyable activities that help pupils develop exceptionally well socially, emotionally, physically and academically. The large variety of challenging tasks is personalised to meet the wide range of pupils' specific needs precisely.

- Relationships between staff and pupils are built on respect, good humour and cooperation. Staff are alert to pupils' subtle changes in expression, body language and mood and adapt learning accordingly.
- Pupils become more resilient because staff have high expectations and reinforce that pupils need to have a go themselves first. Staff display patience and sensitivity to help pupils achieve as well as they do.
- Expert questioning, the consistent use of communication approaches to support pupils' learning, and clear objectives for each pupil allow pupils to take risks, make choices and learn from their mistakes.
- Pupils benefit from health professionals' careful consideration of additional therapies which are woven into their daily routines. For example, pupils start the day with sensory circuits, created in association with the occupational therapist, to improve their balancing, organisational and calming skills. The planned finish to this activity prepares pupils to move to more formal learning well.
- Additional adults are highly effective in helping pupils with a wide range of needs to access learning. They use a range of communication techniques to help pupils understand and make choices, including eye tracking devices and software, pictures and symbols, electronic methods of communication and sign language.
- Pupils are very keen to tell adults about what they are learning. They understand their targets, which are communicated in a pupil-friendly way.
- Staff use praise well, giving pupils the confidence to talk about what they have learned. Pupils self-assess their work on completion, allowing the teacher to adapt subsequent work accordingly.
- Pupils are enthusiastic, willing and fully involved in their learning. They undertake different roles in activities, such as producing their own short film. The school celebrates pupils' successes by hiring a local cinema to show the films to parents, carers, staff and other members of the school community.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Staff plan meticulously and liaise closely with therapists and health services to ensure that they cater for pupils' complex medical needs carefully and sensitively.
- Pupils are delightful. They care about others. They are polite and greet visitors warmly. They readily talk about what they are doing and are a pleasure to be around.
- Pupils say that they feel safe and happy at school. They note that 'When some pupils have big emotions, which can be upsetting, staff support them and help everyone to calm down.'
- Pupils complete a range of activities that they enjoy. Shopping at the supermarket, handling money, tending the raised beds, clearing the grounds, or planting trees in association with the Woodland Trust help pupils to develop useful skills for later life. Parents note that 'There is a lovely community atmosphere and the children are

encouraged to be as independent as possible within a safe and secure environment.’

- Pupils get appropriate help to guide them on what to do when they leave. They highlight the ‘Moving On’ event as a useful forum where, together with their parents, they can speak to other providers, agencies and social care teams about next steps.
- Parents are unequivocally positive. Their children are safe, happy and well cared for. Without exception, every respondent to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, would recommend the school to another parent. One parent noted that her child’s body language ‘demonstrates her enjoyment’.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The high level of parental involvement in compiling EHC plans helps to address key issues. Parents cite the positive relationships between staff and pupils as a sustained strength. One said, ‘The school has been the best thing that has happened to us.’ Another simply said, ‘Fantastic’.
- Pupils can present significant behavioural issues linked to their specific conditions. Staff, parents, pupils and professionals work together to produce individual behaviour plans. Over time, school information shows that pupils learn to manage their behaviour highly effectively. Pupils notice the difference it makes, and, as one pupil said, ‘Staff talking to me stops me getting angry or sad.’
- Parents appreciate the school’s established routines that help pupils to better regulate their behaviour. They notice how their children are improving at home as well as school through the help provided.
- The attendance of pupils is very high. Overall attendance is significantly above the national average for similar schools. A small number of pupils attend less well, but their absences are attributable to their acute medical conditions.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Inspectors cross-referenced pupils’ progress against the targets in their EHC plans. Inspection evidence shows that pupils make exceptional progress from their starting points.
- Leaders’ close monitoring, alongside the expert advice from therapists, helps them to continually review and redraft pupils’ targets to reflect the substantial gains that they make in their learning and personal, social and physical development.
- Evidence of pupils’ progress comes in many different forms. Staff measure individual pupils’ progress against bespoke targets. Although a significant number of pupils are non-verbal, teachers’ use of photos, symbols and clear communication helps all pupils to understand what they are working towards.
- Pupils’ progress from their starting points helps many to lead more complete lives. This may mean being able to read aloud, to express choices and preferences, to develop independent reading skills, or to be able to climb stairs. All achieve exceptionally well. As one parent highlighted, ‘Progression for our children isn’t measured in exams or academic results, but in happiness and small steps towards valuable life skills. The

whole team at Samuel Pepys works tirelessly towards this.’

- Pupils’ individual profiles show that pupils have achieved many of their short-term targets and some are on the way towards their longer-term outcomes. Multi-disciplinary teams are closely involved in setting new and relevant targets.
- Staff are equipped with a range of skills to help meet pupils’ different needs. Staff trained in British Sign Language support pupils with hearing impairments effectively. Pupils’ development of language is supported through a range of techniques and therapies, where staff ask searching questions which extend pupils’ comprehension skills.
- The curriculum focuses on helping pupils to develop functional and transferable skills that prepare them for adult life. Literacy and numeracy are still at the heart of the curriculum, and pupils’ reading assessment and mathematics learning records provide clear evidence of the substantial gains they make in their learning.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Provision for children in the early years is outstanding. The highly effective and experienced leaders have secured significant improvements through their careful and thoughtful planning. Children are cared for exceptionally well.
- Parents visit regularly before their children start at the school. Staff know children before they arrive and so put the right support in place.
- The language for learning and communication in the early years is consistent with other areas in the school. This aids the smooth transition for children and makes sure they are prepared effectively for the next stage of their education.
- The stimulating environment and strong relationships ensure that children benefit from a fun-based, nurturing experience that focuses on their physical, social, communication and sensory development. As part of a sensory story, children were helped to develop their fine motor skills by cleaning their toys with a toothbrush and water.
- Staff complete a thorough evaluation of what children can do when they arrive at the school. Comprehensive assessments, including online learning journeys, are used effectively to establish what each child should do next. These show that children make substantial and sustained progress despite their wide range of complex needs.
- Adults work very effectively together. Teachers plan a range of activities, including small-group work, adult-led activities, some one-to-one tasks, and other opportunities so that children work independently and grow in confidence.
- Leaders provide regular training for staff that helps them to support children in their learning, both verbally and non-verbally.
- Children are safe because their welfare is given high priority. Staff are eternally vigilant to any risks to children’s safety. Intimate care plans are thoughtfully considered and detailed.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding because teachers adapt learning to meet the targets in students' EHC plans extremely well. Teachers plan work that is challenging and enables students to leave with accredited qualifications in English, mathematics and life and living skills.
- The carefully planned curriculum focuses on developing key transferable skills alongside functional learning experiences. Different pathways are available to students dependent on their level of need. The high vocational content provides students with essential travel training, alongside learning life skills and how to handle money.
- Students benefit from a range of extra-curricular activities, including the Duke of Edinburgh Award and residential visits, that help them develop confidence and independence to cope with different situations.
- Targeted information and advice ensure that leaders prepare students highly effectively for life beyond school. Leaders highlight any potential issues to placement teams for any students who may have complex needs. This allows sufficient time for support arrangements to be put in place. Over the past three years, all students have progressed to education or training when they leave.
- Students learn useful skills that will support them in later life. For example, students organised a trip to Huntingdon where they planned their own train travel arrangements, including a practice emergency phone call.
- Students prepare and serve meals at lunchtime. They all have a specific role, including taking orders, handling money, preparing meals or serving staff. This is highly effective in helping students to practise their communication skills in a different environment. They work well as a team and grow in self-esteem.
- Many students complete work experience in the local community, either in local supermarkets or charity shops. It provides them with the skills needed to be successful in the wider community and the world of work.

School details

Unique reference number	110951
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10056191

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	113
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jenny Knight
Headteacher	Joanne Hardwick
Telephone number	014803 75012
Website	www.samuelpepyschool.co.uk
Email address	head@samuelpepys.cambs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 October 2014

Information about this school

- Samuel Pepys School caters for pupils with SEND. These range from moderate learning difficulties to profound and multiple learning difficulties. Pupils often have significant communication difficulties, some have autism spectrum conditions, and a number have severe physical disabilities.
- All the pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school runs an off-site unit for sixth-form students at Ernulf Academy.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning across different lessons and year groups, including the use of additional therapies. Observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked carefully at the quality of pupils' work, their learning records and the targets in their EHC plans to assess progress and teaching over time.
- Inspectors considered the 45 responses to Ofsted's online parental questionnaire, Parent View, alongside the 20 responses to the free-text facility. Inspectors also considered the one response to the pupil questionnaire, and the 37 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the premises manager, a group of staff, a group of pupils and three members of the governing body, including the chair. An inspector met with parents at drop-off time on the first day to collect their views.
- Inspectors analysed and scrutinised the school's self-evaluation and development plans, along with other documentation, including evidence from governors' minutes, school policies and assessment information.
- An inspector made a telephone call to the service director of education to gain the local authority's view of the provision.
- Inspectors examined policies and procedures for the safeguarding of pupils in the school.
- An inspector visited pupils learning on their off-site activity at Paxton Pits Nature Reserve. Another inspector visited the off-site sixth-form provision run by the school at Ernulf Academy.

Inspection team

John Randall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

John Craig

Ofsted Inspector

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