

The Pioneer School

Ghyllgrove, Basildon, Essex SS14 2LA

Inspection dates

30 April–1 May 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

- The quality of education for pupils with profound and multiple special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is excellent. Pupils thrive in this high-quality learning environment.
- The principal, leaders and governors have created a culture where only the best will do. Their determination has ensured that the quality of provision in all areas is outstanding.
- Pupils make substantial progress, personally and academically, across the full curriculum during their time at the school. This is because of the high-quality teaching they receive.
- Leaders and staff have a relentless focus on equipping pupils with the necessary independent skills for life.
- Pupils enjoy their learning a great deal. They are very settled in a consistent and high-quality learning environment. Pupils benefit from exceptional opportunities and experiences for their personal development.
- Leaders use their school assessment systems consistently and very effectively. Pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans, individual plans and further targets are highly individualised and exceptionally well monitored to ensure that pupils make the best progress possible.
- Pupils make remarkable progress in communication, reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils join in lessons with enthusiasm; lessons proceed easily and well.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils have a wealth of high-quality opportunities to develop their physical education and other activities to promote their independent skills. These activities are central to the curriculum.
- Pupils are very proud of their contribution to wider society. Many pupils participate in the choir and help raise additional funds for charities.
- The quality of education in the sixth form is excellent. Students continue to make substantial progress in English and mathematics. They have increasingly meaningful opportunities for work placements to help build confidence and independence.
- Children make exceptional progress in Nursery and Reception. Their needs are precisely met; they are safe and exceptionally well cared for.
- Parents and carers are hugely appreciative of the school's work. Many parents feel that the school has transformed the lives of their children and the wider family.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Maintain pupils' exceptional personal and academic progress, especially in the sixth form, by ensuring that targets and work experience are as precise and meaningful as possible.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The principal, ably supported by her vice-principal and senior leaders, has established a school where nothing but the best will do. Leaders have a relentless drive to ensure that adults' expectations, together with the quality of education provided, are of the highest quality. Consequently, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) make exceptional progress in their personal, social, emotional and academic development from their individual starting points.
- Staff at all levels are highly trained to support pupils who have very complex individual needs. There is a sense of 'can do' that is consistent across the school. Relationships between staff and pupils are highly effective. Staff understand the aims and ethos of school leaders. They ensure that every pupil is provided with the best possible education. Nearly all staff who responded to Ofsted's online staff survey are proud to work at The Pioneer School.
- Leaders effectively use their high-quality assessment systems to ensure that pupils make substantial progress towards their EHC plans. The agreed areas from each pupil's EHC plan are translated into meaningful individual plans and then into further smaller but progressive targets. Leaders rigorously monitor and evaluate the progress that all pupils make against this highly consistent approach.
- Pupils are provided with a well-designed curriculum that has been thoughtfully considered to meet individual needs and promote independence. Each day is exceptionally well structured. For example, pupils have time in core lessons, swimming, learning how to live safely and independently, and the opportunity to learn in the immersive room, study yoga or participate in myriad other well-chosen and high-quality lessons and extra-curricular activities.
- Leaders make extremely effective use of additional funds so that pupils receive variety and a broad range of interesting experiences to further reduce barriers to learning. Pupil premium funding, the sport premium and Year 7 catch-up funding are all used and monitored very well. There is no distinguishable difference between the achievement of any group of pupils. This is because all pupils have equal access to a very high-quality education.
- Middle leadership is very effective. The heads of learning have clear roles and responsibilities. They contribute greatly to the quality of education in the early years and the sixth form, so it is of the same consistently high quality as the rest of the school.
- Leaders are considerate of the well-being of staff. To reflect this, leaders ensure that there are activities available for staff at the beginning of the school day for them to promote positive mental and physical well-being.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is threaded through every aspect of the school day. In one assembly, pupils were encouraged to use 'calm hands' with each other. Pupils were provided with opportunity to think about moral issues. Adults give pupils time to think carefully and thoughtfully so that pupils can form an answer. Pupils enjoy and fully participate in the many songs that are a key feature of the

school.

- Key workers build effective and lasting relationships with families. The work and involvement of parents continues to develop over time, with many parents attending events and workshops at the school. Parents appreciate the photographs they receive that illustrate the achievements of their child. Home-school links are very strong.
- A few responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were mixed, especially regarding homework. However, inspectors found that many parents, including those spoken with, were overwhelmingly pleased with the work of the school and the transformation in their child over time. One parent's comments concurred with that of many others: 'Over the last four years, my child has made significant progress. Not only are the facilities and resources exceptional, but staff foster a nurturing and positive environment.'
- Leaders and staff work effectively with other professionals. They carefully implement strategies that have been provided by educational psychologists, speech therapists and occupational therapists. The school is often chosen to work on research projects or trials of equipment to discover new ways to support pupils' development, particularly in language and communication.
- Leaders liaise with other schools in the local community to ensure that pupils have opportunities to build relationships and carry out activities with their peers in mainstream schools. Equally, leaders continue to build strong and effective links with local businesses, so pupils have the opportunity to contribute to wider society and the workplace.
- Suitable and effective central support is provided by the multi-academy trust, Academies Enterprise Trust (AET). The director for SEND visits the school regularly to offer support and challenge to leaders and check that the quality of education remains a strength.

Governance of the school

- The quality of governance is effective. In recent years, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the multi-academy trust has changed the structure of governance for all schools. Since spring 2018, governance has been shared with another local special school within the trust. In January 2019, a new chair of governors was appointed. Despite these changes, the impact of governance on holding school leaders to account for the quality of education over time has remained strong.
- The governing board members have clear roles and responsibilities. The use of peer principals from the multi-academy trust is proving highly effective in challenging school leaders to continue to make necessary changes in a constant drive for excellence.
- Governors check assessment information thoroughly and regularly so that they understand the progress pupils are making. Leaders provide governors with highly relevant and meaningful evidence regarding the progress pupils make. Consequently, governors ask appropriate questions and are fully informed about pupils' achievement and how achievement carefully links to pupils' EHC plans.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have established a culture where staff are vigilant and alert to issues of a child protection nature. Staff are regularly and well trained. They take their responsibilities seriously.
- Leadership of safeguarding is very strong and rigorous. Leaders work well with other external agencies to ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for.
- Over the past three years, there has been an increase in the training provided to staff. The proportion of suitably trained first aiders is more than usually required, and all required medical training is robust. Consequently, for pupils with exceptionally serious medical issues, staff are very well equipped and apply all processes and procedures diligently.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils have a highly appropriate understanding how to keep themselves safe. For example, pupils receive regular e-safety education when using online technologies. Equally, pupils learn how to use electrical kitchen equipment with care; they demonstrate a secure understanding of keeping themselves physically safe. One pupil explained that there 'must be no running, no pushing' when in the kitchen.
- Key workers are skilled at working in partnership with parents to ensure that pupils are well looked after. The school provides regular workshops and events for parents to develop their ability to support their children effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The quality of teaching and use of assessment information is consistently strong in all classes and across subjects. Teachers are adept at planning interesting topics and activities that help pupils learn and thrive. They deliver lessons with immense skill and infectious enthusiasm. Teachers skilfully use pupils' individual targets to adapt and ensure that every individual is supported, challenged and makes substantial progress.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are extremely strong. All staff know pupils very well, both in terms of their specific SEND needs and individual personalities. Staff use sensory breaks highly effectively and efficiently. Classrooms are happy and productive places.
- Teaching captures pupils' interests. Pupils often experience a sense of awe and wonder when learning. For example, the immersive room is an excellent provision for pupils to fully experience different and engaging environments. As part of the current curriculum, pupils in key stage 1 have opportunity to role play and learn about people who help us, such as doctors and staff who work in hospitals. Pupils' enjoyment is palpable when they are in this room and their progress highly evident.
- Adults make exceptionally good use of the high-quality resources available to spark pupils' interests and develop independence. In 'the flat', pupils learn how to safely prepare simple food and drink and how to take care of domestic appliances. Through carefully produced instructions, pupils learn well and make exceptional progress towards independence.
- Teachers provide incisive feedback to pupils, celebrating pupils' successes and efforts. In all classes, the focus on learning is highly evident. Teachers and support staff are exceptionally skilled at supporting every pupil to overcome the individual challenges

they face when learning.

- Support staff are highly trained and deployed carefully to provide precise guidance and care for pupils. They are very effective in supporting teachers in class so that learning opportunities are maximised. Support staff are acutely aware of when to step in to provide additional guidance and when to allow a pupil to be independent.
- Adults have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Adults are appropriately encouraging. Pupils persevere with activities and this results in them making great strides in their learning. In one physiotherapy session seen, pupils practised using their walking frames or their mats, demonstrating determination to succeed. Their progress over time was highly evident.
- Teachers use assessment highly effectively to ensure that each pupil receives the most appropriate challenge and support in lessons. Teachers effectively use their assessment information to plan learning that ensures pupils experience success and make significant progress towards EHC plans and interim targets.
- All classes provide consistently stimulating and high-quality learning displays. There is an effective and consistent approach that works exceptionally well. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision and the development of effective communication are very evident in every class.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- It is very evident from the moment pupils enter school that they are delighted to be there. They are happy and very well cared for in a high-quality learning environment. Consequently, pupils thrive. They have strong ambitions and high expectations of themselves.
- Pupils relish the many opportunities they have to lead and develop their skills further. In their weekly yoga session, pupils are keen to demonstrate how well they lead a session and do so with exceptional skill. They show that they have increased their knowledge and skills well over time.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural curriculum is exceptional and central to the curriculum. Pupils have time to reflect on their learning or take an active part in assemblies. Pupils in this school relish the many songs that feature during the school day. Pupils participate with enthusiasm and sing with gusto. The choir is very well attended.
- Pupils learn about British values. They are helped to understand their place in the local community and the valuable contributions they can make.
- Adults are exceptionally positive and encouraging. They notice small steps of progress or a 'wow' moment when a child speaks or uses a communication sign for the first time in a lesson. Adults are sensitive and provide appropriate praise. As a result, pupils develop their self-esteem and positive well-being.
- Adults ensure that risk assessments are carefully written for all trips. This ensures that

pupils' medical needs and other potential risks have been well considered. Actions are in place to mitigate further risks. Pupils regularly visit the local supermarkets where they learn to buy items for the café and use money correctly.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils enjoy respectful relationships with adults. Due to a consistent and highly positive approach from adults, pupils learn how to relate effectively with their peers. Pupils' behaviour is impeccable.
- The requirement for adults to use physical restraint is exceptionally rare. This is because adults use relevant and appropriate sensory breaks for all pupils. Adults are attuned to the small changes in a pupil's mood or other non-verbal cues so that potential anxieties or distress are minimised. This results in a calm and productive learning environment where pupils can excel.
- Pupils derive obvious pleasure from the many encouragements from staff. Staff are very sensitive to the need for pupils they work with to be independent. For example, some pupils who require constant support due to medical needs are still encouraged to 'have a go'. Pupils persevere and try hard in lessons.
- Leaders' actions to improve attendance is bearing fruit. Although attendance is still below that found nationally in all schools, this is mostly due to long-term medical needs. Key workers ensure that the school goes the extra mile to make sure that pupils attend school as much as possible. The principal is resolute in her approach to improving attendance.
- Pupils are well supervised at breaktimes and lunchtimes. There is a very good and wide range of equipment, such as an outdoor gym area, musical instruments, quiet sensory areas and gardens. A calm atmosphere and positive relationships continue during these less structured times.
- Leaders' commitment to an inclusive community and meeting the needs of each pupil has meant that the requirement for behaviour sanctions, such as exclusions or dealing with issues of bullying, are exceptionally rare. From minutes of school council meetings, it is evident that there is a commitment from pupils to maintain a harmonious environment where everyone learns.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- From very low starting points, pupils make exceptional progress personally, socially and academically. Every pupil is provided with the precise support and guidance for them to excel against individual EHC plans. Pupils leave the school with knowledge and skills that are crucial for their next step towards independent living.
- Leaders have ensured that all groups of pupils, including the disadvantaged, make excellent progress. There are no discernible differences in the amount of progress made by pupils with different prior attainment because teaching is effectively and consistently personalised and of the highest quality for all.
- Pupils develop effective practical life skills. They regularly use their knowledge, skills

and understanding from English and mathematics in the local community. Pupils of all ages develop relevant practical independence skills that effectively prepare them for adulthood.

- Some pupils read confidently and with enjoyment. They answer questions that demonstrates understanding. Books are appropriately chosen for the age and stage of reading. Leaders have recently upgraded some books to appeal to older pupils.
- Pupils are confident learners and are proud of their achievements. They communicate their needs and interests effectively, using speech and a range of communication systems, including signs and symbols.
- Pupils make substantial and sustained progress in many subjects. They are provided with high-quality lessons in yoga, swimming, music and physical education. All lessons are planned with a clear focus on pupils remembering what they have previously learned and practising their knowledge and skills further.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Children start exceptionally well in the Nursery and Reception classes. Transition arrangements are carefully and thoughtfully planned so that parents are confident their child is well looked after and cared for. Children are happy, with their individual needs precisely and consistently met.
- Leadership of the early years is a strength of the school. The leader is highly skilled and ensures that all staff are provided with the highest quality training and development so that children’s SEND needs can be met.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the Nursery and Reception is excellent. Adults carefully plan a wide range of activities to fit their curriculum theme. Children have many opportunities to develop reading, writing and mathematical skills, either with an adult or through an independent activity on the interactive whiteboard table.
- Staff are enthusiastic and positive in their roles and responsibilities. In a ‘wow’ moment, when a child achieves a new skill or there is a communication breakthrough, the delight for all staff is highly evident. Everyone celebrates. Staff use photographs effectively to share children’s achievements with their parents. In this way, families can also see the impressive progress their children make.
- Children’s personal needs are handled with care and dignity. Policies and practices for intimate care are thoughtfully considered. All welfare arrangements and practices are highly effective.
- The quality of behaviour in the early years is excellent. This is because teachers have carefully considered the curriculum and provide activities that help stimulate and encourage children to fully participate in their learning.
- The outdoor area is used well for children to develop their physical skills. Children often play alongside each other, happy to be in proximity with their peers. Children have highly positive relationships with staff, who are skilled, kind and encouraging.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Students continue to thrive in the sixth form. Independence and readiness for life in the community is given the highest priority. As a result, nearly all students successfully enter either college or work placements. Leaders ensure that they track the next steps and destinations for pupils carefully.
- Careers guidance is thoughtfully planned with students' interests, next steps or individual needs in mind. During careers week, leaders arranged outside speakers to enthuse students and give impartial advice.
- Students have opportunities to develop their skills in other areas of the school, such as the kitchen or working around the grounds. Students take their responsibilities seriously and work diligently and are highly successful.
- Students have routine trips into the community to build their independence skills, particularly with using money at the supermarket. One of their programmes of study enables students to achieve and demonstrate substantial personal development. Leaders are currently developing further programmes of study for the most able students to gain further nationally recognised qualifications.
- Students continue to make exceptional progress in their literacy and numeracy functional skills. This is because adults carry out the same careful and considered approach to planning highly individualised activities that is found in the rest of the school.
- Leadership of the sixth form is ambitious and strong. The leader continues to develop a purposeful curriculum that promotes the development of students' academic, personal, social and independence skills.
- Staff are highly committed to find work placements that interest students and help them gain useful skills and experience. Work placements and target setting are becoming increasingly effective.
- As a result of the well-planned curriculum, strong teaching and detailed assessment arrangements, students develop confidence, improve their communication skills and learn a wide range of life skills.
- Adults use the high-quality resources, such as the flat and the café, exceptionally well so that students systematically learn how to live a healthy life and how to develop personal responsibility in the workplace. Students relish the independence they are afforded and rise to the challenge.

School details

Unique reference number	138219
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10054407

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy converter
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	148
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	18
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Jack Boyer
Principal	Jackie Brathwaite
Telephone number	01268 243300
Email address	admin@pioneerspecialschool.org
Date of previous inspection	19–20 June 2014

Information about this school

- Pioneer School is a large special school for pupils with profound, severe and complex learning difficulties. A large proportion have autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The local authority refers pupils to the school.
- Many pupils have complex health needs that require long periods in hospitals.
- The school converted to Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) in June 2012. The principal commenced her leadership post in 2016.
- Governance at school level is through local governing boards. The board is led by an experienced education professional. The Pioneer School has a joint local governing board with another special school within the trust. The board of trustees are

responsible for setting and monitoring strategic objectives.

- Approximately two thirds of pupils are boys.
- A large majority of pupils are of White British origin.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is above the national average at 34%.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors gathered a range of information to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included observing learning in all classes, some of which were jointly seen with school leaders.
- The inspectors considered pupils' work in books, education, health and care plans and links to the school's assessment information to check the progress pupils make over time.
- Meetings were held with the principal, other senior leaders and middle leaders. A meeting was held with the chair of governors and a representative of the multi-academy trust.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, including plans for future improvement and the school's evaluation of its own performance. Governors' minutes were reviewed.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils were examined, including the statutory information on the recruitment of staff.
- The inspectors spoke with parents and staff to gather their views. Parental views were analysed from the 24 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and comments they made using the free-text service.
- Staff views were also analysed from 37 responses to the online staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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