

Inspection of an outstanding school: Palmerston School

Minehead Road, Aigburth, Liverpool, Merseyside L17 6AU

Inspection dates:

10–11 December 2019

Outcome

Palmerston School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love coming to Palmerston School. This is reflected in their high attendance and exemplary behaviour. Pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they are happy and feel safe in school. They reported that bullying is not an issue. If it does occur, they said that it is dealt with quickly.

Leaders and staff have very high expectations of pupils and are committed to developing their independence. Staff work tirelessly together to provide an education that is carefully tailored to each pupil's individual needs. Pupils work hard and achieve highly. They celebrate others' achievements and contributions through assemblies.

Each morning, pupils have the option of attending the breakfast club, which helps to settle and prepare them for the rest of the day. Pupils feel that teachers really care about them. They have excellent relationships with their teachers. Pupils learn to trust staff. This helps them to feel secure. It also helps them to develop their communication skills.

Pupils enjoy taking part in a very wide range of activities including swimming, trampolining and outdoor education. These help them to improve their physical skills and confidence. Older pupils benefit from well-planned work experience, such as in a local café. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for adult life.

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

Leaders and governors are highly ambitious for pupils. The curriculum meets the needs of pupils exceedingly well. Pupils follow one of three curriculum pathways, depending on their individual needs. Each pathway has a full range of curriculum subjects. Pupils from key stage 4 upwards gain accreditation in a number of areas including English, mathematics, science and ASDAN awards. Students in the sixth form also follow courses that help them move on to their next steps in learning or work, such as horticulture, motor vehicle maintenance, and hair and beauty.

Staff use pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans very well to meet pupils' individual needs. Pupils are taught topics in a logical order. This helps them to build their knowledge over time and supports them to achieve their potential.

Pupils have many opportunities to work with each other and to develop their attention and listening skills. Staff use verbal reinforcements, picture recognition and technological aids well to help pupils improve their learning and understanding. During visits to classrooms, inspectors observed a group of pupils who were able to follow instructions using symbols or text to work independently and safely in the food technology room to make cakes. Reading is very well promoted throughout the school. Pupils develop confidence and fluency with their reading.

The curriculum promotes pupils' physical development exceptionally well. Pupils enjoy taking part in gymnastics training, sports and music activities. These help to improve their self-confidence and coordination. Leaders also arrange horse riding for pupils.

Pupils learn about British values, such as democracy and respect for others. Leaders make every effort to include the views of the pupils. For example, the elected school council has been involved in improving the range of activities during lunchtime. Pupils regularly raise money to support charities. They develop leadership skills through being sports champions and participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.

Pupils respond well to staff instructions and show high levels of engagement with their learning. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary at breaktimes and lunchtimes. Staff help pupils to eat lunch independently and to form friendships with their peers.

Students in the sixth form have the opportunity to develop skills such as washing and ironing for independent living. Students improve their enterprise and employability skills through well-planned work experience placements, such as in a nursing home. All students move on to suitable courses at college or supported living in the community.

The headteacher, well supported by her senior leaders and governors, has created a friendly and welcoming community where pupils and staff are valued. Staff say that leaders care about their well-being and consider their workload carefully. They feel very well supported and spoke highly of the training that they receive.

Parents and carers are very positive about the school. One parent commented, 'The staff work as a team and we feel lucky that my child has a place in such a wonderful school. The school is always looking to improve what they offer.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a culture of vigilance in the school. Leaders undertake appropriate checks on the suitability of new staff. Staff are well trained. They know how to spot potential signs of abuse and know to report concerns. Leaders work closely with external agencies to ensure that pupils get the support they need if there is risk of harm. Pupils learn how to

cross the road safely and how to use public transport in a safe way.

Background

When we have judged a special school to be outstanding we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged Palmerston School to be outstanding in March 2015.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	104748
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10082114
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	119
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	38
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Carol Chapman
Headteacher	Alison Wheeler
Website	www.palmerstonschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	18–19 March 2015

Information about this school

- Palmerston School provides education for pupils aged 11 to 19 with severe learning or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Some pupils have autistic spectrum condition.
- All pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The current headteacher was appointed in September 2016.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school is a nationally accredited teaching school. It provides support for other schools.

Information about this inspection

- We had meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders and groups of subject leaders, teachers and support staff. We met with three members of the governing

body, including the chair. We also met with a representative from the local authority to discuss their work with the school. We also held informal and formal discussions with many pupils and observed interactions during social times.

- We reviewed a wide range of evidence, including the school's self-evaluation, improvement plans and attendance and behaviour records.
- To inspect safeguarding, we looked at safeguarding policies and reviewed the school's record of checks on the suitability of staff and governors. We met with the designated safeguarding leader. We also spoke to pupils about safeguarding and considered parents' views.
- We spoke with some parents during the inspection. We analysed 17 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, 17 text responses from parents and 49 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire.
- We started the inspection by focusing on communication and language, PHSE and physical development. We visited a sample of lessons in these subjects, met with subject leaders, reviewed pupils' work and photographic and video evidence, listened to pupils read and had discussions with teachers and a small group of pupils.

Inspection team

Ahmed Marikar, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Cole Andrew

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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