

Inspection of school: Columbia Grange School

Oxclose Road, Washington, Tyne and Wear NE38 7NY

Inspection dates: 3–4 March 2020

Outcome

Columbia Grange School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils' learning, welfare and happiness are at the heart of Columbia Grange School. Teachers know the needs of each pupil. They know what each pupil can do. They have high expectations for their pupils and want them to do well.

Pupils are keen to take advantage of everything the school offers. They can develop their talents and interests in music or through science and Lego clubs. Pupils relish taking part in educational visits, as well as sports, such as judo, yoga and swimming.

The school is calm, friendly and welcoming. Parents say their children are very happy and safe. They want to come to school. Parents feel staff treat their children with kindness and respect. They say staff 'go above and beyond'. Parents appreciate the support and training they get. Relationships are excellent. Pupils get on very well with staff and with each other. There is no bullying or unkind behaviour. Staff deal effectively with any friendship issues that arise.

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

The headteacher and senior leaders lead with passion and conviction. Their vision has helped the school go from strength to strength. Staff, governors and families share leaders' high aspirations. The outreach team for pupils with autism spectrum disorder is packed with expertise in working with families. These strong partnerships have created a school where all pupils excel. This includes disadvantaged pupils. For many pupils, it is the first time they have been successful in school.

One of the key aspects of this successful school is the way in which teachers plan for each pupil. Teachers write a personal learning plan that supports each pupil with their specific need. Teachers use the information in pupils' education, health and care plans (EHC plan) to plan activities in lessons that help pupils to build on their communication, skills and knowledge. This process works well and ensures that pupils' individual needs are met.

A key strength is the writing of targets by teachers with health professionals. For example, the speech therapists will make sure that communication and social skills have a clear focus. In this way, targets meet the specific needs that pupils have.

Developing pupils' ability to communicate is the core of the curriculum. All members of staff are trained to communicate with pupils in different ways. Teachers use communication programmes, such as Makaton and Picture Exchange Communication System, to help pupils to express their feelings and to make choices. Staff's knowledge of communication is exceptional. In classes, pupils previously not speaking often begin to communicate verbally, supported by staff and other prompts.

Teachers know that their pupils make small steps in their learning. They use their expertise well in helping pupils understand. Staff know pupils need to repeat tasks again and again before their understanding develops. Teachers make sure that the important things are covered so that they can learn more.

Reading has a high priority. Teachers bring books alive. For example, pupils wore amazing animal hats to read a story. Pupils with complex needs focus on what a book is for and what a story is. Songs are used to help pupils to listen to rhythms of speech. This is successful. Teachers make sure that they develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of sounds and letters well. Staff give pupils who can read lots of practice.

Leaders' work to support pupils' personal development is exceptional. Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education underpins everything the school does. From a young age, staff help pupils to be more confident in different social settings. This includes travel training and visiting local shops. Pupils learn how to stay healthy and how to be as independent as possible. This prepares them well for their next school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school takes safeguarding very seriously and all staff receive regular training. Staff are aware of the additional social and emotional needs of pupils. They know the pupils and their families very well. They are very aware of the risks which pupils may have to manage. They provide training to parents to help keep their children safe. Some parents said that staff helped them with ways to manage their children outside of school and they were now confident to take them to new places, such as shops. Governors play an active role in making sure that policies and procedures are effective.

Background

When we have judged a special school, pupil referral unit or maintained nursery 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 second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding on 17–18 March 2011.

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 the school and 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	134184
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10121891
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	115
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Derek Freeman
Headteacher	Lesley Mavin
Website	www.columbiagrango.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	23 February 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a special school for pupils with autism spectrum disorder and learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- There is an outreach service for pupils with autism spectrum disorder supporting mainstream schools and families managed by the school.

Information about this inspection

- We met the headteacher, deputy headteacher and members of the senior leadership team. We talked to curriculum leaders. We met members of the governing body, including the chair. We met the school improvement partner.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: reading and communication, mathematics, science and PSHE. We talked to leaders and teachers about their curriculum plans. We visited lessons. We spoke to some pupils about their learning. We looked at pupils' work and their personal plans.
- We met with those responsible for safeguarding. We looked at a range of documentation linked to safeguarding, including: child protection policies and procedures, absence data, information about how pupils' behaviour is managed and

risk assessments for pupils who are the most vulnerable. We talked to parents during the inspection and asked them about how safe they feel their children are.

- We met with a group of parents. We took into account the 16 responses to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire, Parent View, and the 34 responses to the survey for staff. There were no responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Ann Muxworthy, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Paul Barton

Ofsted Inspector

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