

Inspection of The Edith Borthwick School

Springwood Drive, Braintree, Essex CM7 2YN

Inspection dates: 21 and 22 September 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Good

What is it like to attend this school?

The Edith Borthwick School is a happy place to learn. Pupils' emotional health and well-being are very well supported. Pupils learn, over time, about how to regulate their own behaviour. The atmosphere in school is calm and orderly.

Children settle in quickly when they join in the early years. As pupils get older, they continue to gain confidence and independence as they move through the school. They learn important life skills, such as how to cook, apply their mathematics to real life situations and work as a team. Pupils develop their social, communication, speech and language skills from the early years through to the sixth form.

Pupils told inspectors that they get on with each other. They say that bullying is rare and that they feel safe. Their confidence in school staff to support them if they have any problems is very clear.

Pupils enjoy opportunities to learn away from school, including swimming, visits out in the community, shopping and forest school. Older pupils take part in work-related learning, tailored to their interests, and supported by school staff. Sixth-form students are well prepared to take the next step in learning when they leave school.

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

Leaders have ensured that there is a curriculum that is well planned over time, which allows pupils to develop essential knowledge and skills, increases their independence and access to appropriate qualifications and work-related learning. The planning and sequencing of essential curriculum content in reading, English, mathematics and physical education and development is well developed and taught in the school. This allows pupils to be well prepared for the next steps in their lives. For many, this means training, employment, further education and/or independent living. However, planning is not as effective in some subjects in helping pupils to remember more of what they have learned. In these subjects, the detail of what pupils will learn under 'I can' statements is not always clear.

Leaders have prioritised the development of early reading and communication for all pupils, in every year group, including in the early years. Staff have had recent training in the teaching of early reading, and more is planned. Most are confident and effective in helping pupils to learn how to read. Staff are also adept at using a range of different communication approaches to support pupils' learning. This means that pupils can enjoy either reading themselves or being read to. They are excited about the work underway on the new school library.

Staff use a range of methods to support those pupils with the most complex needs to enjoy different experiences, for example using sensory methods involving sounds, taste, touch and smell. This helps pupils to be independent and skilled, and to communicate their views with staff and their peers.

There are opportunities within the curriculum for older pupils and students to gain other important life skills, including through food technology, shopping, budgeting, community visits and residential. Some take on ambassador roles, working with pupils from other schools. Effective in-school careers advice ensures that pupils and students are well advised and supported to make plans for their future. Staff work with pupils, parents and external agencies, including social services, colleges and work-related training providers to manage students' transition beyond school. Many students go on to further studies in local colleges.

Leaders and all school staff want the best for children, pupils and students. The therapy and education teams work together so that learning and the curriculum are well-matched to pupils' needs. Plans are precisely dovetailed to pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Regular reviews allow new learning to build on what pupils already know. As a result, staff know individuals exceptionally well, and pupils can access and make effective progress in the curriculum.

Staff know pupils well, so they spot any signs of anxiety. They are skilful in defusing potentially difficult situations and supporting pupils to understand how to regulate their own behaviour. Any disruption to learning is rare and very well managed. Pupils are polite, helpful and welcoming. They are proud of their school.

In the early years, children are well supported to settle in. They learn about expectations of behaviour through play and social interaction. Routines to support learning are established quickly. Staff work closely with families to ensure that all pupils attend school regularly.

Pupils' personal development is promoted through a range of opportunities. They gain confidence through these opportunities, which include serving in the school café, enterprise projects such as 'save the bee', the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and much more. From the early years onwards, pupils understand the importance of physical development, exercise and staying healthy.

Staff say leaders are supportive and take account of their workload. Leaders have worked closely with staff to improve morale since the previous inspection. Staff told inspectors that they 'have a voice now and are heard'. Training and the ongoing professional development of staff are a high priority. Governors are appropriately trained and well-practised in holding leaders to account for the school's performance. Most parents are highly positive about the provision and support offered.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors have ensured that safeguarding pupils is a high priority. Statutory requirements are met, including the required checks that staff are suitable to work with children. Staff are vigilant. They are kept up to date through regular

training. They know what to do if they suspect a pupil is at risk of harm. Close working with external agencies, including social services and health professionals, helps them to protect vulnerable pupils and get them the support that they need. Leaders are persistent in following up on concerns. Safeguarding records are appropriately maintained and regularly reviewed. Pupils are taught effectively about safety and healthy relationships, and to respect individual differences.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum is not yet sufficiently well planned and sequenced in some subjects. However, it is clear that leaders have already taken action to plan and to train staff in how to deliver it. For this reason, the transition arrangements have been applied.
- Some curriculum plans are not fully developed. The precise detail of content to be taught, and in what order, is not always laid out, so that some pupils do not always remember what they have learned. Leaders should ensure that all subjects set out precisely subject content, which point it will be taught, and when it will be revisited in order to help pupils to remember more and apply what they already know to new learning.

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.

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	115464
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10200535
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	246
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Stephanie Taylor
Headteacher	Dan Woodman
Website	www.edithborthwick.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 May 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The Edith Borthwick School is a special school catering for pupils with a wide range of complex special educational needs and/or disabilities. The proportion of pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties is rising.
- The school offers places for pupils aged 3 to 19. There are currently no children attending the school's nursery provision.
- Almost all pupils have an EHC plan.
- A high proportion of pupils have complex needs linked to speech, communication and language, including autism spectrum disorder.
- The school does not use alternative education providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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 that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They also met with the leaders responsible for pupils' personal development, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding, as well as the school's special educational needs coordinator.
- The lead inspector met governors, including the chair and vice-chair of governors.
- Inspectors checked school policies, pupils' safeguarding records and the pre-employment checks made on the suitability of staff to work with children.
- The 110 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for school staff and 48 Parent View responses were looked at, along with the 47 free-text comments parents submitted. Inspectors gathered the views of a wider group of staff and pupils in meetings and informal conversations while they were in the school. An inspector spoke with some parents as they dropped children off at school.
- Inspectors carried out an in-depth review of pupils' physical development and physical education. They also looked in depth at communications, speech and language, as well as pupils' personal, social and health education. Alongside lesson visits, meetings were held with curriculum leaders to review curriculum planning. They also met with teachers and teaching assistants. Inspectors looked at pupils' work and spoke with them in meetings and informally around the school.

Inspection team

Christine Dick, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sue Cox	Ofsted Inspector
Wendy Varney	Her Majesty's Inspector

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