

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Freemantles School

Smarts Heath Road, Mayford Green, Woking, Surrey GU22 0AN

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Inspection dates:

16 and 17 November 2021

## **Outcome**

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

At Freemantles, pupils' complex autism is accepted as part of their unique personality. Teachers go out of their way to understand each pupil's needs. Leaders have high aspirations for all pupils. They value the importance of pupils' communication and provide plenty of opportunities for its development. Learning picture exchange is often the very first step for pupils to begin understanding how to communicate socially.

Pupils enjoy their practical lessons. They learn through daily outdoor experiences. Pupils make regular visits to the woods to experience a calm and natural environment. These visits build confidence and help to reduce anxieties. Pupils also take part in residential visits, including short stays in the school's caravan. Secondary and sixth-form pupils work hard tending the horticultural area. They enjoy caring for the school's menagerie of small animals. This range of opportunities provides pupils with ideas for future work and promotes long-lasting interests.

Parents praise the support they get to manage their child's needs. Parents' typical view is that 'this school cares as much about our children as we do'. Staff know that unkind words and behaviours between pupils can be confusing, and cause upset. They are quick to make sure that any incidents of perceived bullying are dealt with appropriately.

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

Teachers and leaders understand pupils' individual needs and interests extremely well. Pupils' social and communication needs and their emotional well-being always come first. Everyone works together well. There are positive relationships between pupils and teaching staff. Staff make regular contact with parents to share strategies to support their child's development.

Leaders have designed the curriculum to be rich in experiences. It aims to develop confidence and prepare pupils for their future. Pupils have many opportunities to be out and about in the community. They learn to express themselves through real-life tasks, for example by visiting the bakery or working in the school's café. These activities help pupils to develop an understanding of the world beyond school.

Right from the start of their Reception year, children begin learning how to communicate through picture exchange. Reception children settle quickly into school routines. At key times, they work individually with a member of staff, building their stamina for learning. They learn to sit with others and they like using the outdoor area to explore. The early years curriculum continues into Year 1. Here, and throughout the school, pupils develop their enjoyment of using language. They listen to stories, joining in the repeated sentences of traditional tales. Pupils pay attention to the sensory objects that teachers use to support understanding. They also like finding information that supports their interests.

Teachers are highly skilled in developing pupils' communication and reading. They follow clear plans to support pupils to understand different texts. These include signs, lists and books, as appropriate to each pupil's understanding. Teachers' effective use of assessment helps them to decide upon the next steps in learning.

The school offers many opportunities for pupils to become independent communicators. This helps them to be well prepared for their next steps in education. Teachers support students in the sixth form to take part in interesting work placements. Together, they consider sensible choices of college placement. Staff help students to develop as many independent living skills as possible.

Mathematics is at the forefront of leaders' current work to develop the curriculum. Well-planned approaches help key stage 1 pupils to use practical resources to build an early understanding of number. The outside classroom areas offer many opportunities for primary pupils to practise counting. The mathematics curriculum does not help all pupils to build upon what they already know and can do. Some teachers do not have enough guidance to identify pupils' next steps. In key stage 4 and in the sixth form, accredited courses provide useful direction for teaching mathematics. Although leaders' work to improve the mathematics curriculum is under way, it is at an early stage of implementation.

Pupils like their teachers and they are attentive during whole-class sessions. Lessons are carefully structured to support pupils with positive learning behaviours. Staff are well trained to manage pupils so that lesson time remains focused. The behaviours of a minority of pupils can sometimes be especially challenging. Where they are needed, well-prepared plans identify strategies that aim to de-escalate incidents.

Staff are proud to be part of the school and the majority of them commend their leaders' expertise and efforts. Some staff feel that leaders do not help them to perform their roles well. Leaders are working with staff to reduce teachers' workloads and they have removed some specific responsibilities. However, there is some ongoing anxiety about workloads and managing pupils' needs.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have robust systems in place to keep pupils safe from harm. Leaders make sure that all staff know their safeguarding responsibilities. They recognise and report any signs of concern quickly. Leaders take all reports seriously and have clear procedures in place for referrals.

Staff appreciate that some of their pupils face specific risks. The school advocates strongly for its vulnerable pupils to have the support they need. Leaders have thought carefully about tackling concerns over potential peer-on-peer abuse. They have included this aspect in their staff training. They know, too, that the internet brings particular threats.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Not all teachers have a secure understanding of every subject and course they teach. This is particularly the case in mathematics. This means that some pupils are not building on their previous knowledge. Leaders should strengthen curriculum planning by identifying the key mathematical concepts that pupils need to know, and by sequencing the steps that support pupils to know, understand and be able to do more.
- During this inspection, some of the school's staff expressed concerns about the level of professional training they receive to understand how to meet pupils' special educational needs and manage their behaviours. There are also some concerns about workload. Leaders need to provide timely training and professional development where it is needed. They need to address workload concerns where this is causing anxiety.

## Background

When we have judged a 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 or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in November 2016.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	125477
<b>Local authority</b>	Surrey
<b>Inspection number</b>	10200311
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	202
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	25
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	David Vaughan
<b>Headteacher</b>	Justin Price
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.freemantles.surrey.sch.uk">www.freemantles.surrey.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	2 and 3 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Freemantles Special School caters for pupils between the ages of four and 19 years who have complex social communication needs and/or autistic spectrum conditions.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- At the time of the inspection, there were two classes in each year group up to Year 7, and one class in Years 8 to 11. The school is growing in size so that, over time, there will be two classes of 9 pupils in each year group.
- The school is not currently using any alternative providers.
- The school is commissioned by Surrey County Council to run an outreach service for pupils with autism in mainstream schools. Currently, the outreach service is supporting nearly 1,000 pupils in Surrey schools.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection of the school 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 held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers, the school's improvement partner and members of the governing body, including the chair. These discussions considered the quality of education, the wider experiences of pupils at the school, aspects of pupils' behaviour and leadership and management. An inspector also met a group of parents and spoke by telephone with the school improvement partner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: communication and reading, mathematics, and personal, social and health education. Each deep dive included discussions with subject leaders and teachers, lesson visits with leaders, and meeting pupils as we visited lessons and looked at their work. Inspectors also met a group of post-16 students considering their destinations when they leave the school.
- Inspectors evaluated the 103 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire. Account was taken of the 137 staff questionnaires that were completed, and 23 pupils' questionnaire responses.
- Inspectors spoke with staff, governors and parents about how the school keeps pupils safe. An inspector examined the single central record of the checks undertaken to make sure that staff are suitable to work in school. Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding policy and procedures.

## Inspection team

Linda Jacobs, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Emma Phillips

Ofsted Inspector

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M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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