

Inspection of a good school: Kingsdown School

Snakes Lane, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS2 6XT

Inspection dates:

1 and 2 March 2022

Outcome

Kingsdown School continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if the inspectors were to carry out a section 5 inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a section 5 inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils love school. Staff make sure pupils feel happy and safe. Bullying does not happen. Pupils thrive because of the expert care and support from staff. Parents are supportive and would recommend the school to others.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy learning. They bounce in through the doors each day, smiling and communicating with staff. Behaviour is exceptionally good. Pupils are polite, respectful and friendly. They take care of one another and give each other 'high fives' when they feel things have gone well.

Pupils follow their own special curriculum, with personal targets which are well suited to their needs. There is a wide range of learning and enrichment activities. Together with the high-quality care, pupils are well prepared for the next stage.

Pupils learn to communicate in the best way they can. This is a top priority. Good teaching and positive relationships with constant praise and encouragement are very evident. These combine to give all pupils, including those who are non-verbal, a means of communicating their needs and interests.

Dance, trampolining and soft play promote pupils' movement skills well, including those in wheelchairs and walkers. Music has a powerful impact on pupils. They enjoy the many opportunities to sing and play instruments, which enriches their lives. Celebrations of achievement in assemblies are fantastic.

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

The national curriculum is not suitable for most pupils. Leaders have implemented a curriculum that aims to meet the personal needs and interests identified in each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan.

Staff use pupils' EHC plans and their 'hello this is me' profiles to plan learning in: communication; thinking skills; movement; personal, social and emotional development; and well-being. Pupils follow one of three curriculum pathways according to their age, needs and abilities. The pathways are not fully established. Limited face-to-face learning during the COVID-19 pandemic means that a significant proportion of pupils are still catching up with their learning.

Staff are adept at weaving individual pupils' targets into everyday learning. Planning includes academic targets and personal ones, such as how to play together, feed themselves and put on their coat. Regular assessments capture the incremental amounts of progress pupils make against the personal targets set for them.

Promoting regular communication underpins much of the school's work. Singing together each morning sets the tone for learning. In lessons, stories are used well to capture pupils' interest and generate discussion. Symbols, gesture, speech, signing and electronic devices are used extensively to encourage verbal and non-verbal pupils to communicate.

Pupils interact well with staff and with each other. They show great excitement and enthusiasm for learning. Those for whom reading is appropriate are taught to read phonetically. One-to-one interventions led by trained support staff help to boost pupils' early reading skills. Leaders want to raise the profile of reading further. Story bags and reading books are taken home by pupils to encourage them to read more often. All classes are timetabled to use the library.

Counting songs and actions engage younger pupils in a fun, enjoyable way. Learning is planned so that each pupil starts with familiar numbers, then, as they gain in confidence, progress on to more challenging calculations. In board games, pupils are expected to use their thinking skills to work out how many more points are needed to win. Pupils use real money, to feel and recognise shapes, and decide the value of each coin. Tasks are set to calculate what they can buy and whether any change will be given.

The school is fully inclusive. Pupils needing specialist equipment and those reliant on constant medical care are fully involved in school life. This includes active learning in dance and music, and enrichment activities such as orchestra and off-site visits. In assembly, the school song is sung with gusto. Staff look out for the additional 'WOW moments' that happen when a pupil achieves something over and above the targets set for them. These achievements are celebrated by all.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspectors agreed that ensuring that curriculum pathways become fully established and enabling those who have missed schooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic to catch up may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All of the necessary checks are made when appointing adults to work with children. Rigorous procedures are in place to raise concerns and record the actions taken by staff to resolve them. Significant concerns are escalated in a suitable way. A recent serious concern referred to the local authority was managed appropriately and in a timely way by leaders. Links with local support agencies are firmly in place. The school has firmly established procedures to support parents of pupils with disabilities and more complex needs. Staff engage well with families to ensure that they receive the support they need and that their children remain safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have implemented an innovative and ambitious curriculum. The COVID-19 pandemic has slowed its development. Leaders have identified the skills they want pupils to learn and are putting in place new resources to complement current curriculum planning. Leaders should continue with this work to enable staff to check that all pupils are catching up with their learning.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 good in June 2014.

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	144692
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	10212034
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	123
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Katy Duddridge
Headteacher	Louise Robinson
Website	www.kingsdownschool.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with severe and profound multiple learning difficulties. A significant proportion of pupils have physical disabilities and associated learning difficulties.
- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for the pupil premium is well above average.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language is average.
- The predecessor school was last inspected in 2014.
- The headteacher joined the school as a deputy headteacher in 2016. She was promoted to headteacher in September 2017.
- The school converted to an academy in 2017. It is part of SEN Trust Southend.
- The school does not make any use of alternative, off-site provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders, a range of middle leaders and support staff, a group of pupils and four members of the governing body.
- An inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Due to the nature of the specialist curriculum, inspectors did not carry out deep dives into subjects. Instead, they selected eight pupils as case studies to follow in order to gauge the quality of education provided. Inspectors looked closely at: communication, thinking skills, movement and music. This included discussions with leaders, scrutiny of curriculum planning documents, pupils' personal targets and each pupil's EHC plan. They visited lessons, talked to pupils where appropriate and scrutinised their work.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's single central record and met with the designated leader for safeguarding.
- The inspectors considered 28 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View, and 14 free texts from parents. They also considered 51 responses to Ofsted's survey of staff. Ofsted's survey of pupils' views was not used.

Inspection team

John Mitcheson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sue Cox

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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