

Inspection of Hill Park School

Foredown Road, Portslade, Brighton, East Sussex BN41 2FU

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 June 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Early years provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy their time at Hill Park. They are keen to tell visitors about what they like about their school. They are inquisitive and friendly. They notice when their friends need help. They are not afraid to celebrate when others achieve well. They are openly proud and supportive of peers who contributed positively and confidently to discussions with inspectors.

Expectations of behaviour are suitably high, equally so for children in early years. The school environment is mostly calm and orderly. Adults and pupils interact well together. Playtimes are active and harmonious. Pupils say they feel free from bullying. They show good manners, including when visitors are hit by footballs in the playground!

Pupils say they feel safe at school. They appreciate the support that teachers give them to help them learn. This includes when they struggle because they feel that the work is difficult. Pupils are positive about the care they receive when they are feeling unhappy or cross. Secondary phase pupils shared that the 'just right' system really helps them regulate their behaviour and understand their emotions. Older pupils are also excited about sport on Fridays and the prospect of residential trips that are opening up once more.

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

Leaders have ensured that the school has improved since the last Ofsted inspection. Mindful of the potential difficulties in merging two schools in the relatively recent past, leaders have established a clear vision for Hill Park and are moving the school forward at a pace.

The school's curriculum is highly distinctive. Based on the national curriculum, it has been tailored to meet the very specific needs of the pupils it serves. All pupils follow bespoke pathways of learning. Teachers design lessons based on individual pupils' needs. This often means planning small steps of learning, which are repeated as required. Despite this, the curriculum has ample breadth throughout all phases of the school.

The curriculum for older pupils focuses on enabling them to access entry level qualifications across a range of subjects. This includes mathematics and English, but also in subjects based on pupils' interests and ambitions for the future. Because of this, the school has a successful track record in preparing pupils for entry into college.

Younger children in early years also benefit from carefully individualised provision. Because the school caters for pupils with a wide range of complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), their starting points are often different. Despite this, staff are skilled at designing learning that engages children well.

Pupils enjoy books here. Leaders promote reading well. They understand that pupils will learn to read in a range of different ways. This is mainly through the school's phonics programme. A mobile library system helps pupils access a range of reading material, including sensory and tactile books.

Classroom visits showed that staff know pupils well. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively to support pupils to access learning. Teachers ask timely questions to confirm pupils' understanding. Staff constantly assess pupils' progress and reshape tasks or their approach when needed.

The school's work to support pupils' personal development is strong. School leaders see their work in this area as crucial to ensuring pupils' happiness and success, both in and out of school. They strive to give pupils the tools to allow them to express their feelings. They know that building pupils' confidence, resilience and emotional literacy is important. Much of this work flows from the personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) scheme of work. This also focuses on developing pupils' understanding of equalities and diversity. Appropriate careers information is available for older pupils.

The school is beginning to widen its extra-curricular offer which has been restricted by COVID-19. Older pupils talk eagerly about the return of residential trips that give them experience of outdoor adventurous activities. Pupils also enjoy activities in the local community. Leaders see this as an extension to school life and important in preparing older pupils for life after leaving the school.

Governors know the school well. They work strategically but are aware of the day-to-day business of the school. One commented that the governors are not 'spectators' at a show. Governors are knowledgeable and active in their work. This ensures that they carry out their statutory duties effectively.

Parents who talked to inspectors were very positive about all aspects of the school. They praised the work of leaders and the dedication of staff. A small minority of parents who responded to Ofsted's survey were less positive about some aspects of the school's provision.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The culture to keep pupils safe is strong here. Staff are very aware of the additional vulnerabilities of the pupils who attend the school. This includes the potential hazards associated with the use of social media. Staff know what to do if they have concerns. The school's well-being team works hard to support whole families as well as the individual pupils. Partnership work with professionals from outside agencies is effective. This enables leaders to broker the right interventions for pupils and ongoing support for families when required.

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	114687
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	10210895
Type of school	All-through
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	197
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Robert Hardy
Headteacher	Rachel Burstow (Executive headteacher)
Website	www.hillpark-brighton-hove.secure-dbprimary.com
Date of previous inspection	13 February 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a special school for pupils who have severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school does not currently use alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause.

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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the executive headteacher, heads of school, curriculum leaders, the leader of the well-being team and teaching and support staff. The lead inspector met with the vice chair of governors accompanied by one other governor. He also held separate telephone calls with an officer from the local authority and the school's independent improvement partner.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, science and PSHCE. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work, and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils. The lead inspector heard pupils read to a known adult.
- Inspectors checked a range of policies and documents, including the school's single central record. They also reviewed the school's website and other records regarding the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff.
- Inspectors gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour, the school's wider curriculum offer and how leaders support staff with their workload.
- Pupils were talked to throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school. A formal meeting was held with two representative groups of pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents submitted through Ofsted's parent survey, as well as talking to parents at the start of the school day. The views of staff were also considered through Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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