

Inspection of an outstanding school: New Siblands School

Easton Hill Road, Thornbury, Bristol BS35 2JU

Inspection dates:

1 and 2 November 2022

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at New Siblands School are remarkable in the way in which they approach their learning and respond to staff's high expectations of them. Pupils show determination to overcome any barriers to learning that they face, no matter which curriculum pathway they follow. This is clear in their positive attitudes to learning and the way in which they conduct themselves in and around the school. Secure and nurturing relationships exist between all staff and pupils. As a result, the school is a calm and purposeful place to learn.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They start the day with a warm welcome from the member of staff that greets them. Pupils are keen to get into school and start learning. They know what bullying is and say that it does not happen often. They know that concerns would be acted on quickly if they occurred.

All pupils experience an extensive range of opportunities across their education. This ensures that they develop into independent and resilient young people ready for life beyond school. However, the academic curriculum is not as ambitious and consistent as it could be so that pupils have the best possible offer available to them.

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

Staff are dedicated and highly knowledgeable about how pupils learn and communicate. Staff act as champions for pupils to ensure that pupils have a voice and are heard. They want the very best for pupils.

Leaders prioritise pupils' wider development in order to prepare them as well as possible for the next stage in their life. They work closely with external professionals, such as a speech and language therapist and a clinical psychologist, to make sure the offer is

accessible and has maximum impact. Careers education and work experience are a high priority in the school and at post-16. The wealth of opportunities and experiences fully support pupils as they prepare for adulthood. Pupils in key stages 3 and 4 look forward to beginning these opportunities and post-16 students are aware of how this has had a positive impact on them.

Leaders have carefully considered the curriculum pathways to ensure that they cover the range of needs of all pupils. This also includes advice and guidance from external partners to further enhance what and how pupils learn. The impact of this is highly successful in some subjects. Other subjects are more recent in development. As a result, they are not yet as well embedded. Leaders continue to work closely with staff to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of the pupils. They recognise the need to strike the right balance between being chronologically and cognitively age-appropriate. However, the curriculum design and assessment in these areas are not as secure as the core areas of reading and mathematics.

The early reading curriculum develops pupils' communication very well. There is a clear understanding of how early communication and exposure to books is fundamental to children in the earliest stages of reading. 'See and Learn' and the new approach to phonics build on this successfully. Pupils enjoy listening to adults read to them. Staff make sure that books are accessible through story sacks and effective use of communication aids to encourage participation. Pupils in post-16 work on their functional reading skills to prepare them for life beyond school. However, there is not yet an effective approach that ensures that pupils aim for the most ambitious outcomes. Across the curriculum, leaders have not fully considered the best possible outcomes that some pupils may be able to achieve.

Governors share the ambitious vision of school leaders. However, similarly, they have not fully appreciated the need to include the most ambitious end points for some pupils in the curriculum.

Staff use the outcomes in education, health and care (EHC) plans to target what pupils need to learn and assess how well they make progress. They break these down into smaller steps, 'priority learning goals (PLGs)'. The system and process around this are not yet as consistent and effective as they could be. This means some pupils do not always get the most precise support they need.

Leaders have recently reviewed the way in which they support pupils to manage their behaviour with greater success. This was in response to the changing needs of pupils and information they have collected over time. The result is the positive behaviour support base. Even in its initial stages, this is making a highly positive impact. Incidents where pupils become dysregulated and show high-risk behaviours are decreasing because both staff and pupils have more effective strategies to de-escalate situations successfully.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Leaders ensure that staff receive relevant and up-to-date training. Staff know how to report and record concerns they identify. They know these concerns will be taken seriously. Staff know pupils and their families well. Leaders appreciate how valuable this is to be able to provide any help and support needed at the earliest opportunity.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school. They know who to go to if they are worried. Older pupils can recall learning about how to keep themselves safe online, in relationships and when travelling with growing independence.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- For some pupils, the curriculum is not designed to ensure that they achieve the best possible outcomes. Leaders do not fully assure themselves that curriculum goals are as ambitious as possible. As a result, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Leaders need to ensure that the curriculum is as ambitious as it can be to support what pupils know and remember over time.
- Some aspects of the curriculum and assessment systems are not as well embedded and consistent as they could be. As a result, some pupils do not always get the most precise and appropriate learning and support that they could. Leaders need to ensure that there is a robust and consistent approach to monitoring the implementation and impact of their actions and decision-making so that all aspects of the curriculum are secure and consistent.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, New Siblands School, to be outstanding in November 2017.

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.

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

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| Unique reference number | 146013 |
| Local authority | South Gloucestershire |
| Inspection number | 10241452 |
| Type of school | All-through Special |
| School category | Academy special converter |
| Age range of pupils | 2 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 126 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 20 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | David Tubb |
| Headteacher | Karl Hemmings |
| Website | www.newsiblands.org.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 24 November 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- New Siblands is a special school which caters for pupils from the ages of 2 to 19 years. It provides for pupils with severe and profound multiple learning difficulties. There are also an increasing number of pupils with autism spectrum disorder.
- The school is one of two special schools which form Enable Trust. It joined when the trust was founded in 2018.
- All pupils have EHC plans.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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, deputy headteacher, assistant headteachers, subject leaders and members of staff. In addition, an inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair, the school's improvement adviser, the chief executive officer and a member of the multi-academy trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector listened to pupils read to an adult.
- Inspectors considered how well the school protects pupils and keeps them safe.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site.
- Inspectors analysed school documentation and a range of policies and procedures, including those that relate to the curriculum and EHC plans.
- An inspector listened to the views of parents and carers on the second day of the inspection. The 18 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including nine free-text responses were also considered, along with the responses to the pupil survey and 68 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Leanne Thirlby, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Andy Lole

Ofsted Inspector

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