

Inspection of an outstanding school: Royal School, Manchester

Stanley Road, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport, Cheshire SK8 6RQ

Inspection dates:

15 and 16 November 2022

Outcome

Royal School, Manchester continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Royal School Manchester is an exciting and inspiring place to learn. Pupils, and students in the sixth form, flourish. Each day, they are greeted with a warm smile and a friendly face. Pupils benefit from strong, caring relationships with staff who know them extremely well.

Leaders have the highest expectations of what pupils and students can achieve in their learning and behaviour. Leaders' unrelenting ambition for pupils starts from the moment they join the school. The school's curriculum places no ceiling on pupils' success. It prepares pupils and students, all of whom have complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), exceptionally well for their next steps in education and adult life.

All pupils behave exceptionally well. This is because staff are highly attuned to the feelings and anxieties of pupils and are successful at minimising them. Staff skilfully help pupils learn to regulate their behaviour and manage their emotions.

Bullying is extremely rare. If it should happen, pupils know that adults will deal with any issues immediately and sensitively.

Pupils benefit from an impressive range of activities to promote their wider personal development. Pupils have an extremely smooth transition through the school and into adulthood.

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

Leaders have designed a highly effective and ambitious curriculum. The strategies in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans are seamlessly interwoven into all aspects of the curriculum. Leaders and staff skilfully draw on the expertise of therapists to think carefully about the knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils must learn in order to achieve future success. Due to a well-thought-out and well-designed curriculum, pupils' and students' achievement is exceptional.

Teachers are experts at using the information that they have about each pupil to break down learning into small, manageable steps. Staff have a deep understanding of how to adapt the delivery of the curriculum for all pupils. Teachers are highly attuned to how calm or anxious pupils are in lessons. They expertly use this knowledge to maximise moments of engagement or to give pupils a break from learning.

Developing effective communication and language skills is at the heart of leaders' work. Adults carefully consider the best way to use the wide range of strategies available to help pupils communicate. For example, they use visual signing and picture-based communication systems to help pupils choose lunch in the canteen or know about the activities of the day. Staff use technology exceptionally well to support and enhance communication for pupils who have very little physical movement or limited speech.

Although some pupils and students can identify symbols and pictures, very few are at a developmental stage that enables them to recognise letter sounds to form words or read sentences. Despite this, reading is a priority in the school. Pupils enjoy visiting the school library. This has been thoughtfully designed as a sensory experience to encourage pupils to find and appreciate books and enjoy stories.

Post-16 students experience a highly personalised and motivating curriculum. This supports their development of personal, social and employability skills. Students are guided by comprehensive careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG). This includes work experience, work placement opportunities and other practical experiences, which are all geared to developing students' confidence, resilience and independence skills. Students are extremely well equipped for adult life and the world of work.

Pupils behave exceptionally well. All staff recognise that negative behaviour is a form of communication. Pupils benefit from staff's highly effective strategies to support their behaviour needs. Over time, pupils increase their ability to regulate their own behaviour. Pupils respond positively to the rewards that they receive for trying their best. Pupils enjoy a harmonious environment that supports their effective learning.

Leaders offer an impressive range of opportunities for pupils' personal, social and life skill development. This includes horticulture, cookery, making crafts to sell, engaging with animals and working on a farm. Sixth-form students also take part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. All pupils and students have a specially designed individual programme to encourage them to be healthy and active. These programmes inspire pupils to participate in and enjoy activities such as climbing, swimming, cycling, wheelchair dancing and using the gymnasium.

The outstanding school leadership team is supported by a highly effective, knowledgeable and experienced governing body. They are also challenged about the quality of education by the wider group of trust directors, who hold leaders fully to account. Staff are well supported with their workload and well-being. They are proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong safeguarding culture throughout the school. Leaders and staff are well trained, and the procedures in place to identify and report concerns are well understood by staff. Staff are strong advocates for all pupils. They are vigilant in looking for indications that pupils could be at risk of harm, especially as most pupils are unable to communicate easily.

When safeguarding needs are identified, leaders engage very well with external agencies to get timely support for pupils and their families.

Leaders ensure that pupils learn about different risks in a way that is appropriate for their age and level of cognitive understanding. They often use real-life examples to learn about the risks they might face online and outside school.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in October 2012.

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

Unique reference number	106166
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	10210954
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	53
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Lynn Perry
Headteacher	Emma Houldcroft
Website	www.seashelltrust.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 September 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- A new headteacher took up post in September 2020.
- All pupils at Royal School Manchester have an EHC plan. The school caters for pupils with complex and profound disabilities and special educational needs, in particular multisensory impairment (deaf and blind), autism spectrum disorder and related communication difficulties. In addition, a few pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Some pupils also have medical needs.
- Pupils attend the school from a large number of different local authorities from across the country. At the time of the inspection, there were no children in early years or pupils in key stage 1.
- The school is part of a trust that also runs a further education college, an adult residential provision and a children's home. Some of the school's pupils live in the children's home.

- In January 2023 the school will be moving to a new, purpose-built, state-of-the-art school building. It is situated adjacent to the present school and sits within the larger Seashell Trust site.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative 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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and language, including aspects of early reading; mathematical development; personal and social development; and physical development. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, and looked at samples of pupils' work. Where appropriate, inspectors spoke to some pupils about their learning. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Where appropriate, inspectors spoke with pupils school life.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, known as the head of school, and members of the senior leadership team.
- An inspector spoke to the special educational needs coordinator, and behaviour and CEIAG leaders.
- Inspectors held discussions with members of staff, which focused on the well-being and safeguarding of pupils.
- An inspector spoke with members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. She also spoke to members of the trust's executive team, including the director of education and the director of people and workplace.
- An inspector also spoke on the telephone to two representatives of Stockport local authority.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to school improvement, safeguarding and the checks undertaken on newly appointed staff.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.

Inspection team

Sue Eastwood, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lindy Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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