

# Inspection of a good school: Herons Dale School

Hawkins Crescent, Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex BN43 6TN

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Inspection dates:

7 and 8 February 2023

## Outcome

Herons Dale School continues to be a good school.

## What is it like to attend this school?

The school's calm and inclusive atmosphere contributes well to pupils' experience and enjoyment of school. Staff develop strong relationships with their pupils, who feel safe and secure as a result. Leaders address any concerns about bullying promptly. Staff welcome pupils warmly at the start of the school day. Pupils are polite and interested in visitors, asking them lots of thoughtful questions. The youngest children have settled into school life well. They are keen to learn and they smile often.

Leaders' work to support pupils' communication skills is impressive. Staff work tirelessly to find a communication technique that works for each pupil. The impact on pupils' ability to express a view is significant and plays a central role in pupils' growing confidence.

Staff have high expectations, and most pupils behave well. However, a recent rapid growth in pupil numbers, combined with an increase in the number of pupils with more complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), has put a strain on school resources. For example, pressure on space means that classrooms can be very busy places at times. Most pupils cope well when this is the case, but some pupils find learning more difficult, particularly those who are sensitive to sound and movement.

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

Leaders have designed a curriculum that provides a suitably broad range of subjects. The content is carefully tailored to support pupils' different needs. The mathematics curriculum is a particular strength, equipping pupils with a secure knowledge of number and reliable strategies for tackling mathematical problems.

Pupils' personal development is, quite rightly, given a high priority. Pupils learn skills which will help them to become more independent, such as using cutlery, preparing a salad, or taking off a coat. They are taught about the importance of keeping safe, including when using the internet, and learn about healthy relationships. Staff provide pupils with regular opportunities to develop interests and explore the wider world, including trips and visits.

Staff are highly knowledgeable about teaching communication methods, which are carefully tailored to pupils' individual needs. During the inspection, for instance, some of the youngest children used communication boards successfully to indicate who they would like to say 'hello' to during an early morning song. Activities such as these help children to understand that their choices and views are valued. Staff assess pupils' learning throughout each day, tailoring activities skilfully according to pupils' responses and needs.

The teaching of reading is a well-established part of the school's curriculum. The school's phonics programme works well, with plenty of repetition to help pupils to practise and remember what they have learned. Pupils are rightly proud of their progress in reading. During the inspection, a pupil was keen to demonstrate his reading prowess to the inspector. He read confidently, accurately and with great enthusiasm.

The headteacher and her team have responded to recent increased demands on the school with skill and creativity. A programme of restructuring and refurbishing means that pupils continue to learn in bright, inviting and well-resourced spaces. Timetables have been adjusted so that the school continues to run smoothly. The school's curriculum continues to be aspirational, and the school motto, 'We can do anything', is unchanged. However, increased pressure on space makes behaving well more challenging for some pupils, whose needs mean that they are highly sensitive to their surroundings. Staff are skilled in managing pupils' behaviour so that any disruption during lessons is kept to a minimum. They are quick to recognise signs that pupils are struggling. Leaders use strategies such as humour, distraction and reassurance successfully to diffuse potentially difficult situations.

Well-established routines and clear boundaries help pupils to feel safe and secure. Staff take good care of pupils. They are dedicated to the school and its pupils. One said, 'I love what I do, and I love working here.' Staff report strong teamwork and feel well supported. However, staff also point to a heavier workload due to the growth in pupil numbers. In recent months, high levels of staff absence have made it difficult for the school to operate as normal. At times, arrangements for some pupils to learn at home have been put in place to ensure their safety and well-being. Staffing levels have now recovered, although leaders are acutely aware of the potential for this to change. Most parents are highly supportive of the school. However, a small number of parents have understandable concerns, given recent changes and the impact of staff absence.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a robust training schedule to ensure that all staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding policies and procedures. Regular briefings ensure that staff have an up-to-date understanding of topics such as how to report a safeguarding concern, online safety and the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders make sure that new members of staff have key safeguarding information from the outset. Staff are clear about what to do if they are worried, including how to contact the local authority designated officer if necessary. Recruitment procedures are rigorous and suitability checks are completed in a timely manner.

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

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

- The rapid growth in pupil numbers, combined with an increase in the number of pupils with more complex SEND needs, is putting pressure on the school's resources. It is becoming increasingly challenging for leaders to maintain a high-quality education. Leaders should continue to work with the local authority to find a solution and to ensure that the school continues to meet the needs of its pupils effectively.

## 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 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 good in February 2013.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	126169
<b>Local authority</b>	West Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10256549
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	140
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Rebecca Dunn and Joe Lightbody (co-chairs)
<b>Headteacher</b>	Isabel Robson
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.héronsdale.co.uk">www.héronsdale.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	7 December 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Herons Dale School caters for pupils with a wide range of SEND, including severe learning difficulties, multiple learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, speech, language and communication needs, and autism spectrum disorder. An increasing number of pupils also have social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils also demonstrate challenging behaviour.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The number of pupils on roll has increased rapidly during the past two years. The school was operating above its published admission number at the time of the inspection.
- The school uses three unregistered alternative providers.

## 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, the assistant headteachers, the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. They also spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection.
- The lead inspector met with four governors, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading and communication, mathematics, and personal, social and health education. Deep dives included visiting a range of lessons, looking at pupils' work, and talking with leaders, teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons, during the lunch break, and at other times during the school day.
- The views of staff and parents were gathered through a range of sources, including Ofsted's surveys and informal discussions at the start of the school day. The lead inspector also spoke with a number of parents by telephone.
- Inspectors assessed the school's culture of safeguarding throughout the inspection. Inspectors checked the single central record and reviewed a wide range of safeguarding documents and records.

### **Inspection team**

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

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