

Inspection of a good school: Grove Park School

Church Road, Crowborough, East Sussex TN6 1BN

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 March 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good 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 are safe and cared for in this nurturing and inclusive school. They feel understood by staff and other pupils and feel happy to have made friends. Bullying and unkind behaviour happens very rarely. When it does, staff skilfully help pupils to understand the impact their words or actions may have on others.

Pupils have warm and trusting relationships with adults. They show their trust by letting staff help them in their learning and care. Pupils are positive in lessons and during breaktimes. They behave consistently well and show genuine kindness to each other and to the adults helping them.

Leaders are ambitious that pupils will leave the school well prepared for the next stages in their life. However, there are inconsistencies in the quality of education in all phases. Pupils do not always experience learning that builds their knowledge over time. In addition, pupils, especially those within the secondary phases, do not receive consistently effective teaching of phonics and early reading.

Leaders have good intentions and are making plans to improve the quality of education for pupils. However, as these are not yet in place, pupils are not benefiting from these changes to the curriculum.

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

Leaders are ambitious for what pupils will achieve in the school. Senior leaders are aware of the improvements needed within the curriculum and have plans in place to achieve this. This has included recent recruitment to strengthen the leadership team, with the aim to improve the quality of education in the school. However, the impact of this new work on developing the curriculum is not yet evident in the school.

Pupils within the school have a broad range of complex needs. When pupils start at the school, leaders quickly put in place the therapy and care that pupils need. They work with families and outside agencies, such as health and therapeutic professionals, to make sure that support for individual pupils is precise and effective. Due to this, pupils settle well into school life.

Teachers gain detailed knowledge of pupils' needs through expert training and guidance. They make appropriate adaptations to lessons and the physical environment to ensure access for all. They use a range of communication methods and assisted technologies to ensure pupils interact with others and the environment. Teachers use education, health and care plans to inform short-term targets that help pupils to meet their individual targets. This is most effective in meeting pupils' health and social care needs. Teachers use baseline assessment well to understand what pupils know when they start at school. However, ongoing assessment of pupils' learning is not accurate. This means that teachers do not consistently set targets that help pupils build knowledge over time.

Leaders have put in place commercial schemes for the teaching of phonics and mathematics. This decision is working well in mathematics. Here, the teaching of mathematics is more consistent, and teachers' subject knowledge is more secure. Teachers within early years classes adapt resources well to secure pupils' knowledge of number. This knowledge is built upon throughout the rest of the primary phase. Within the secondary phase, pupils apply their mathematical knowledge to use calculations accurately and solve problems.

Leaders prioritise the teaching of reading. They have ensured that pupils have access to books which match the sounds they are learning. Within the early years and primary phases, the scheme is being taught with fidelity. Teachers adapt resources well and most activities planned help pupils to gain and remember phonics knowledge. However, within the secondary phases not all activities are well matched to individual pupils' needs. While leaders expect phonics to be taught across the school, some teachers within the phase do not have the expert knowledge to do so. As result, lesson activities chosen do not teach pupils to recognise letters and their associated sounds. Consequently, some pupils do not gain secure knowledge of sounds that will help them to eventually read words independently.

The school's personal, social, health and economics (PSHE) education curriculum is well sequenced. Teachers plan lessons which give pupils knowledge that prepares them for life in modern Britain. This includes learning about difference, personal safety and the social skills that will help them be part of their community. Teachers plan well-considered activities to teach pupils valuable life skills. Pupils learn how to plan and cook meals well, make a bed and to organise their time. Within the sixth form, teachers have a sharp focus on helping students to become independent. Leaders use the views of students to make sure enrichment activities match their interests and needs. By doing this, students learn how valuable and important their voice is in deciding what they do.

From Year 7 onwards, pupils learn about various education, employment and training options. Leaders have sequenced the careers programme carefully and pupils build employment skills well over time. In the sixth form, most students undertake work

experience placements independently. For those who do not, employment activities are planned into careers lessons so that students can practise the skills they have learned during their time within the secondary phase.

Governors and leaders have swiftly acted upon recommendations from external consultants. They have a secure understanding of what needs to change in the school and have set out well-considered plans to achieve this. Most staff feel that leaders prioritise their well-being. However, leaders are aware that for some staff, the many recent changes have been difficult. Leaders and governors are committed to giving staff the training and support they need to ensure the best possible outcomes for all pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that staff are well trained to spot signs that a pupil may be at risk. They know how to report and record any worries effectively. As such, staff are quick to raise any concerns. This means leaders have been able to take robust action to keep pupils and their families safe.

Leaders work in partnership with outside agencies to make sure that families are getting the help they need, when they need it.

Leaders make the required checks on all who work within the school. They have a secure process in place for managing concerns about staff.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders are in the process of developing their approach to several subjects in the school's curriculum. Currently, pupils are not learning as well as they should. They do not build knowledge that will help them access future learning. Leaders should prioritise the design and sequencing of these subject areas and ensure that staff have the knowledge and training to implement the curriculum consistently well.
- Some teachers and support staff do not have knowledge to implement the school's phonic scheme correctly. This means that pupils do not develop secure phonics knowledge to be able to read or access other learning materials. Leaders should ensure that all staff have expert subject and pedagogical knowledge of phonics. They need to understand the scheme that leaders have adopted and deliver it as intended.
- Some leaders are new to their roles. As such, the changes they are making to the curriculum are not yet in place, and there is inconsistency in the quality of education across all phases. Leaders should continue to build leadership capacity so that the ambition and vision leaders have for the school are fully realised and evident in common practice through the whole school.

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 March 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.

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	114688
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10242126
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special school
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	134
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	37
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	John Hayling
Headteacher	Julie Champion
Website	www.grove-park.e-sussex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	1 December 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Grove Park School provides specialist support for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities, severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and autism spectrum disorder. All pupils attending the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school does not currently make use of alternative education provision.
- The school operates from three sites.
- 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 educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The lead inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other members of the leadership team. The lead inspector met with the chair of governors and four other members of the governing body.
- The lead inspector also met with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons. They also spoke to pupils in lessons and during play and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors considered a range of documents including leaders' evaluations of the school, their school improvement plan and minutes from governors' meetings.
- Inspectors took into account the views of parents and carers through their responses to Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors took account of the views of staff through conversations and the responses to the online staff survey.
- Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements in the school by speaking with leaders, staff and pupils. They met with the designated safeguarding leads to discuss the arrangements for safeguarding. During these meetings, the lead inspector scrutinised records and sampled case files to explore how the school identifies and supports pupils at risk of harm. The lead inspector also examined the school's work to recruit and check on the suitability of staff as well as checking the knowledge of staff about their responsibilities.

Inspection team

Nina Marabese, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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