

Inspection of an outstanding school: Norman Gate School

Vigo Road, Andover, Hampshire SP10 1JZ

Inspection dates:

21 and 22 March 2023

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. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders maintain a warm, welcoming and positive atmosphere in the school. Pupils are interested in visitors, often greeting them with a smile and a wave, or a polite question about who they are. Staff provide strong role models for pupils. They combine high expectations of learning and behaviour with care and understanding, so that pupils feel safe and comfortable.

Pupils enjoy learning and are understandably proud of their achievements. They behave well in lessons and around the school. Classrooms are calm and purposeful. Everyday tasks, such as eating lunch or using the toilet, are used effectively as opportunities to encourage and support pupils' independence.

The school's values are promoted throughout school life. This means that pupils are familiar with what these are, and they understand what they mean. During the inspection, for instance, one pupil proudly announced, 'Good teamwork!' when he and his classmate had successfully completed a jigsaw. Pupils are taught to respect the views of others. They listen to adults and to each other politely and with interest. Important events in the life of the school, such as the Christmas production, are carefully planned so that everyone can take part, and all feel included.

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

The school's broad, well-balanced curriculum supports pupils' personal and academic development well. It includes plenty of activities which help pupils to develop interests and bring learning to life, such as swimming, forest school sessions and trips. These contribute well to pupils' enjoyment of school, and most attend well.

Leaders put reading first. They have updated the school's phonics programme in response to pupils' changing needs during the past few years. The programme is taught effectively across the school and its emphasis on reinforcing what pupils have learned is working well. Pupils learn secure reading skills and enjoy books. Children in the youngest classes are encouraged to listen and attend to sound through a wide range of activities. During the inspection, for instance, children thoroughly enjoyed listening to their teacher, as she 'splatted' shaving foam and powder paint to reinforce counting skills. This provides them with a valuable introduction to early phonics skills. Now that the phonics programme is securely in place, leaders are moving the focus of development to other areas of the school's work. They have begun to review and revise the curriculum in subjects such as geography and history, so that what is taught in these subjects is more closely matched to what each pupil needs to learn.

The school's curriculum prepares pupils effectively with knowledge and skills to support them in their future lives. Teachers take every opportunity to build pupils' independence and confidence. Life skills, such as dressing and personal hygiene, are taught from the outset and according to pupils' needs. Pupils learn how to communicate their thoughts and wishes using a variety of techniques, such as Makaton and 'choice boards'. During the inspection, for instance, some of the pupils used signs and symbols to tell their teacher how they were feeling and which activity they were looking forward to, while others used pictures to choose a snack. Approaches such as these are clearly effective. However, there are variations in how well communication strategies are taught across the school, which leaders are rightly keen to address.

Teachers respond to pupils' needs with sensitivity and skill. They know what to do when pupils are finding school hard, and they provide timely support. The nature of pupils' needs means that their behaviour disturbs lessons from time to time. The skill with which adults support pupils when this is the case means that any disruption is kept to a minimum.

The headteacher provides dedicated and compassionate leadership. She has prioritised improvements carefully since her appointment, making sure that each development is securely in place before going on to the next. This has ensured a manageable workload for staff, who speak of strong teamwork, shared ideals, and considerate leaders. Governors are alert to the impact developments in the school are having on staff workload. They work closely with the headteacher to monitor staff morale. Most parents are pleased with the school, although a few are less positive. One parent's comment reflects the views of many: 'The staff at this school are amazing. They go above and beyond to ensure my child has a positive school experience. He is learning new things all the time. I am proud that he is a pupil at this school.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school is well organised with well-established routines in place to keep pupils safe. Adults take good care of pupils. They follow the school's safeguarding policies and procedures closely, reporting and recording key information carefully. Leaders use a range

of activities, including training and regular staff briefings, to make sure that staff have an up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding matters. Leaders take swift action whenever a concern is raised, and work constructively with agencies. Recruitment checks are completed properly when new members of staff are appointed. Effective procedures are in place to ensure that nothing is missed.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The range and complexity of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities have increased significantly since the last inspection. The curriculum in the foundation subjects is not as well adapted to support these needs as it is in the core subjects. Pupils do not always learn as well as they could in these subjects as a result. Leaders should continue work to develop the curriculum in the foundation subjects.
- There are variations in how well pupils are taught strategies to communicate. This means that they do not always make as much progress in communicating thoughts and ideas as they could. Leaders should implement plans to improve this aspect of the school's work.

Background

When we have judged 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 June 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

Unique reference number	116604
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10242105
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	108
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	David Drew
Headteacher	Lisa Collins
Website	www.normangate.hants.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 July 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Norman Gate School is a special school for pupils between the ages of two and 11. All pupils have an education, health and care plan to support their moderate learning difficulties. Pupils often have additional learning difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorders.
- The headteacher was appointed in April 2022.
- The school does not use 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 met with the headteacher, assistant heads, and other senior leaders. The lead inspector also met with a local authority representative.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection. They also considered the views expressed by staff in Ofsted's survey.

- The lead inspector met with three governors, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and geography. Deep dives included visits to a range of lessons, a review of pupils' work, and discussions with leaders, teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons, during the lunch break, and at other times during the school day.
- Parents' views were gathered through a range of sources, including Ofsted's survey and informal discussions at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors assessed the school's safeguarding culture 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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