

Inspection of a good school: Bensham Manor School

Ecclesbourne Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 7BN

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 March 2023

Outcome

Bensham Manor School continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a very special school that pupils are happy to attend, and where it is safe to be yourself.

Expectations are extremely high. Leaders' unrelenting ambition for pupils starts from the moment they join the school. Leaders offer an impressive range of opportunities for pupils' personal, social and life skill development. This includes horticulture, cookery, childcare, animal care, and even learning to drive.

Pupils are excited about learning because lessons are fun and enticing. As one pupil put it, this school is an 'adventure'.

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 in learning how to regulate their behaviour and manage their emotions. Staff told inspectors that if they need help, leaders are always on hand. Bullying is extremely rare. If it should happen, pupils know that adults will deal with any issues immediately and sensitively.

Pupils pride themselves on being part of such an inclusive school. Parents and carers are also overwhelmingly positive about the school. More than one parent said the school has been 'transformative' for their child.

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

Leaders are single-mindedly determined to provide a curriculum that meets each pupil's needs and they place no ceiling on pupils' success. 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.

Teachers are experts at using the information that they have about each pupil to break down learning into small, manageable steps. They understand how to make lessons relevant for all pupils. Consequently, pupils can recall not just recent learning, but what they learned in previous school years. For example, pupils in Year 10 were able to give details of Year 8 history lessons where they learned about the American civil rights movement.

Pupils read with confidence, accuracy and fluency. They know what it means to be a good reader, and why this is important. Pupils routinely use technical vocabulary to help build new skills and knowledge. They can recognise what is good about their work, and how it could be improved. This allows them to independently refine their skills as they consider the next steps and longer-term curriculum aims.

Pupils' well-being is at the heart of all that the school does. For example, the school's fitness programme makes sure pupils are ready to learn at the start of each school day. The personal, social, health and economic curriculum helps pupils to make informed choices about their adult lives. Pupils learn about different cultures. They understand the importance of tolerance and respect. These values are learned and lived as part of the culture of the school. Pupils take part in community and charity work. Older pupils attend sessions at the local colleges. This helps them explore opportunities and plan their next steps.

Leaders have carefully considered the curriculum for relationships and sex education (RSE). The RSE curriculum provides pupils with important knowledge to help them form healthy relationships and to keep themselves and others safe.

The school council and the pupil leadership team play an important role in improving the school. They understand the importance of representing the whole school community and are strong advocates for the rights of others. This includes those from minority groups.

Students in the sixth form take their learning very seriously. They can apply skills to unfamiliar situations or activities, and this helps them to work as independently as possible. Students are guided by comprehensive careers education, information, advice and guidance. This includes work experience, work-placement opportunities and other practical experiences, which are all geared toward developing students' confidence, resilience and independence skills. By the time pupils leave school, they all have useful qualifications.

Governors' regular visits to the school help ensure that they are well informed. They provide a good balance of challenge and support for leaders.

Teachers feel that workload is manageable and that they are well supported by senior leaders. This allows them to focus on personalising learning, and to be innovative with the activities and support provided. Staff told inspectors that they feel a strong sense of belonging to the school. One said, 'We feel like a family.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and records are detailed and of high quality. Staff vetting and checking systems are completed thoroughly. Staff training is comprehensive and responds well to local risks and individual pupil's needs.

Staff know pupils and their families well. They are well trained so are able to identify signs that might mean a pupil is at risk. They are vigilant and report all concerns to the safeguarding leaders in a timely fashion. Leaders have close links with a wide range of agencies. They get professional help for pupils and their families who may be at risk and who need help to support their welfare.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. There are appropriate arrangements in place to ensure that pupils are safe when using the internet.

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 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	101851
Local authority	Croydon
Inspection number	10268801
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	239
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	13
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Martin Williams
Headteacher	Fiona Robinson
Website	www.benshammanor.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 January 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a special school for pupils between the ages of 11 and 18 years.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school caters for pupils with moderate and severe learning difficulties. Many have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.
- The school does not use 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.
- During the inspection, inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and other leaders, including curriculum and pastoral leaders.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, and personal development. For each deep dive, inspectors 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 also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors met with members of staff individually and in groups and spoke to pupils at various points during the inspection. Inspectors took account of responses to pupil and staff surveys, as well as Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors looked at records relating to behaviour, bullying, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding arrangements by checking the school's approach to staff recruitment, scrutinising policy documents and meeting with the designated safeguarding lead.

Inspection team

Francis Gonzalez, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Sylvia Kerambrum

Ofsted Inspector

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