

Inspection of a good school: Southbrook School

Bishop Westall Road, Topsham Road, Exeter, Devon EX2 6JB

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 June 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. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending Southbrook School. Parents and carers appreciate the help that staff give to them and their children. They feel that the school enables pupils' confidence and independence to grow.

Despite this, the quality of education pupils receive is inconsistent. For example, leaders have not identified the essential knowledge and skills they want pupils to learn in all subjects. As a result, pupils do not build their understanding well enough over time.

Pupils are safe and happy. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Staff understand and support pupils' individual needs well. As a result, pupils know that staff will look after them and help them to learn.

Pupils behave well. They are respectful of each other's needs and engage well with learning. Staff skilfully support pupils in managing their emotions so that they learn over time how to become more independent. If a pupil needs a break from class, staff use carefully considered strategies to help pupils re-engage quickly. Bullying is rare. If this does occur, staff deal with it quickly and effectively.

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

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils. However, this ambition is not yet fully realised. Turbulence in leadership has slowed the pace of improvement, particularly with the curriculum. Despite this, senior leaders and governors are aware of what they need to do to bring about the necessary improvements. There are well-considered plans in place to address the weaknesses. However, much of this is new. Therefore, it is too early to see the impact on pupils' learning.

In some subjects, such as English, teachers use assessment well. They effectively check on pupils' understanding and use information to inform future learning. However, in other subjects, assessment is in its infancy. It is not yet well used to check on pupils' understanding or to inform what pupils learn next. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their learning and do not build their knowledge well over time.

Leaders prioritise reading. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the range of books they read. Leaders have put in place a programme to support pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read. Staff benefit from the training they receive to teach phonics effectively. However, the books that pupils read are not well matched to their individual needs. This hampers the progress they make.

The school's personal development programme is comprehensive. Pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships. They enjoy the wide range of enrichment opportunities that the school offers. These include a range of clubs and a variety of off-site visits. Leaders ensure that all pupils have opportunities to experience adventurous activities. These build pupils' confidence and resilience.

The school provides effective support to prepare pupils for adulthood and the world of work. Pupils receive appropriate careers education, information, advice and guidance. The school measures itself against the Gatsby benchmarks to ensure pupils receive high-quality careers advice. All pupils move on to positive destinations when they leave the school.

There is a consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour in school. Staff understand pupils' individual needs well. They skilfully help pupils to learn to regulate their emotions and manage their behaviour. As a result, pupils have positive attitudes to learning. For example, when learning about contraception in the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, pupils show very high levels of maturity and respect.

Governors know the school well. Following a review of their effectiveness, they now have a clear understanding of their role. Governors challenge school leaders and hold them accountable for their work. The overwhelming majority of staff say that senior leaders are considerate of their welfare and workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have developed a strong safeguarding culture. They prioritise regular safeguarding training for staff. The systems for reporting safeguarding concerns about pupils are thorough and robust. Leaders make referrals, when necessary, to external organisations. This ensures pupils receive the help they need. Governors check that leaders complete staff vetting procedures thoroughly.

The curriculum provides pupils with information to help them stay safe online and in the community. Leaders have suitable policies in place to raise awareness among staff, pupils

and parents about the dangers of sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the key knowledge that leaders want pupils to learn is not clear. This means that pupils do not consistently acquire a deep and well-connected body of knowledge and skills. Leaders should identify, precisely, the essential knowledge they want pupils to learn and in what order.
- The current phonics scheme does not provide pupils with materials appropriate to their age and needs. This limits the progress they make in becoming fluent and confident readers. Leaders should fully implement the proposed changes to the phonics scheme, including training all staff. This will ensure pupils have access to appropriate books to support them in gaining confidence in reading.
- Assessment is still being developed in some subjects. It is not yet used well enough to check that pupils have remembered the knowledge they have been taught. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge and do not build their knowledge well over time. Leaders need to ensure that teachers use assessment effectively across all subjects and use this information to inform future learning.

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 January 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	113634
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10256803
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	146
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Fiona Bowie
Headteacher	Simon Winward
Website	www.southbrook.devon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 October 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher was appointed in October 2022.
- Southbrook School is a special school for pupils aged between 11 and 16.
- The school caters for pupils with varied complex needs and abilities including moderate or severe learning difficulties and autism. Pupils may also have speech, language and communication difficulties, sensory impairments and/or physical disabilities.
- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 and members of the senior leadership team. The lead inspector also met with the chair of the governing body and three other governors. The lead inspector also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English (including reading), PSHE and geography. 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 scrutinised the school's safeguarding arrangements. They spoke with staff and pupils about safeguarding. The lead inspector met with the designated leader and reviewed the school's systems and single central record.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View and considered the results of the Ofsted staff and pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Mark Burgess, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Jason Edge

His Majesty's Inspector

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