

Inspection of Soundwell Academy

St Stephens Road, Kingswood BS16 4RL

Inspection dates: 6 and 7 June 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Previous inspection grade Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

There are lots of smiles at this school. Staff smile because they love spending time with the pupils. Pupils smile because they can be themselves. They know that staff like them, respect them and want the best for them.

Strong, trusting relationships between staff and pupils are the reason that this school is such a happy place to be. All pupils have particular social, emotional or communication needs. Staff make sure that pupils feel secure. Pupils learn to trust adults, behave appropriately and get along with each other.

Staff skilfully teach pupils how to understand and manage their own feelings. They also teach them how to recognise and respect the feelings of others. As a result, pupils learn how to cope in social situations with other children and with adults.

It does not stop there. Staff are determined that every pupil will achieve academically as much as they can. Staff provide pupils with the knowledge and the personal and social skills they need to prepare them for adulthood. Pupils overcome their anxieties and catch up on essential basic learning, such as how to read. As they get older, pupils work towards gaining nationally recognised qualifications. This opens up their future career options.

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

All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Leaders are determined to prepare them well for adulthood. To this end, leaders have created a curriculum that teaches pupils what they need for employment, for independent living, for good health and for interacting with friends, family and community.

When a pupil joins the school, staff take the time to get to know them. They unpick what makes the pupil happy and what makes them anxious. Leaders then create a personal plan for the pupil. Staff follow the plan to support the pupil to handle situations that may arise in the classroom and at social times.

Leaders set clear expectations for what pupils must learn in subjects such as English and mathematics. For example, they insist that every pupil will learn to read. Many pupils join the school without being able to decode words. Leaders have made sure that staff have the expertise to teach the phonics that pupils need to do this. As a result, pupils learn to read independently.

This level of detail is still under development for some subjects. Leaders are in the process of extending the range of subjects on offer as pupils reach Year 11.

Leaders train staff in how pupils learn best, and about what can get in the way. Staff appreciate this guidance. As a result, teachers teach in ways that meet each pupil's needs and pupils achieve well. As part of this process, teachers use non-threatening techniques to check whether pupils have remembered what was taught in the past.

For example, pupils read letter sounds from flashcards or complete short quizzes in lessons.

Every part of school life adds something specific to pupils' personal development. Nothing happens by chance. Staff identify what skills pupils need to develop. They then provide an experience to help it happen. For example, some pupils recently visited a café to practise their social skills in the community, with the aim of making the café staff smile.

Leaders take similar care with careers guidance. They tease out pupils' interests and guide them towards appropriate next steps. This includes providing access to relevant qualifications.

The school opened around three years ago, in temporary accommodation. The academy council has overseen the move to the current site and the rapid growth in numbers. It has kept a firm focus on providing the best for pupils. The council is working well with the new sponsor to ease the transfer of the trust.

Leaders have worked hard to ensure that the school provides a good quality of education in its first few years. Their systems and processes are still new. They know that there is a challenge to achieve complete consistency beyond the core subjects as the age range of its pupils expands and the curriculum grows.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The vigilance around safeguarding reflects the high degree to which every member of staff knows pupils well and wants the best for them. Leaders have made sure that staff are well trained to identify concerns. Issues are followed up promptly and meticulously.

Teaching pupils to be aware of risk and keep themselves safe is a strong feature of the curriculum. It addresses issues such as safety in the home and when outside. It teaches pupils about the dangers of being online. It also teaches about healthy relationships, both in person and in the virtual world.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- As the age range of pupils extends, maintaining the consistency of provision and extending it across the breadth of the school's work will be a challenge. Leaders need to ensure that the processes that have been successful so far maintain and enhance the quality of provision consistently across all aspects of provision for all pupils.

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	147889
Local authority	Bristol City of
Inspection number	10256598
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	126
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Margaret Simmonds-Bird
Headteacher	Craig Abbs
Website	www.soundwell.learnmat.uk
Dates of previous inspection	26 June to 3 July 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school opened in September 2020 in temporary accommodation in Patchway. It moved to partial use of its present site in September 2021. The current facilities were fully opened in September 2022.
- All pupils at this school have an EHC plan for social, emotional and mental health needs or for speech, language and communication needs.
- The school was opened by the Learn@MAT multi-academy trust. From September 2023, the Midsomer Norton Schools Partnership Trust will sponsor the school.
- The school uses one alternative provider, Rocksteady Training, to enhance its curriculum offer to include vocational qualifications.
- 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 the deputy headteacher; other senior leaders; and five members of the academy council, including the chair. The lead inspector spoke to the interim chief executive officer via telephone.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: personal, social and health education, mathematics and English. 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 inspected safeguarding by meeting with the designated safeguarding lead and headteacher, speaking to other school staff, talking to pupils and scrutinising records relating to child protection.
- Inspectors also spoke to staff and pupils, and looked at documentation, about behaviour, bullying and wider opportunities for pupils. They spoke to staff about workload and considered the responses from Ofsted's online surveys of staff and of parents (Ofsted Parent View). Inspectors also held telephone conversations with six parents.

Inspection team

Sandy Hayes, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Teresa Hill

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023