

Inspection of an outstanding school: Sunningdale School

Doxford Park Way, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR3 2PP

Inspection dates:

6 and 7 June 2023

Outcome

Sunningdale School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

From the moment pupils start at Sunningdale school, they receive the highest levels of care, support and learning to enable them to be their best selves; as the school motto says, to 'be more'.

Leaders have developed an inspirational curriculum that ensures that learning is tailored to meet the needs of all pupils. Because of this, pupils display exceptionally high levels of engagement in learning. They make rapid progress from their starting points.

Sunningdale's purpose-built school has been designed with exceptional care to give pupils access to the resources that they need to learn. Due to flexible timetabling and responsive staff, pupils can access areas when they need them. These include a role play learning village, sensory spaces and the hydrotherapy pool.

Staff care deeply for the pupils. They know pupils extremely well and adjust learning activities continuously to ensure that they are appropriate. In turn, pupils love coming to school, and are respectful of staff and each other.

Parents and carers speak highly of the support their child receives. One parent, echoing the views of others, commented: 'Sunningdale is an amazing school which works really hard to bring out the absolute best in my child.'

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

Leaders organise the curriculum into four pathways. Each pathway has carefully sequenced planning documents. These identify the important skills that pupils need to learn to become as independent as possible. These documents come to life in the classrooms, which are set out with engaging learning resources that hook pupils into learning.

The expert knowledge that all staff hold of the pupils contributes to the success of the school. Starting from early years, teachers observe pupils carefully. They build up a picture of what each child finds motivating and engaging. This information is then used to create exciting and purposeful learning activities.

Staff support pupils from early years onwards to develop their communication skills. There is a highly consistent approach across school. Pupils use a range of means, such as switches and symbols as well as speech to extend their language skills. Every activity has communicative support built in. This encourages pupils to develop their expressive communication. This is mirrored in the way that pupils develop their mathematical understanding. Pupils are taught early problem-solving skills. When they are ready, pupils move on to learning about numbers, calculations, measurement and shape. Every consideration is made for pupils to practise and ground their learning in real-life contexts. For example, pupils routinely queue up at the school shop, where they select and buy a snack.

Early reading has a high priority. Leaders are ambitious for all learners. Pupils in one of the pathways are learning to read using phonics. They are taught well-planned daily lessons and are making good progress in learning to blend sounds. Staff take care in ensuring that pupils develop a love of reading. They have a variety of ways to share books, from massage books and sensory stories to active stories and sound books.

Teachers use an online assessment tool to monitor and track pupils' progress across all areas of the curriculum. They use this information to plan the next steps of learning. As a result, pupils make strong progress from their starting points.

Leaders ensure that pupils learn to become increasingly independent as they progress through school. Personal targets are in place for pupils for self-care and independence. These cover areas such as eating, drinking and learning to cross a road safely. There are also regular learning opportunities on themes such as stranger danger and being a good friend. Leaders have taken time and care to plan wider learning opportunities. These ensure that all pupils can experience exciting and life-enhancing activities. The events include judo, community visits, residential trips and surfing.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary despite the many barriers and challenges that they face. The staff are tirelessly creative in seeking out the best ways to support pupils. Outside and indoor play areas are used highly effectively to ensure that pupils can take movement breaks as and when they need them.

The governing body shares the headteacher's passion to make sure that every pupil can be their best self. The information leaders provide ensures that governors know the school's strengths well. This helps them to support school leaders in their ongoing drive for further improvements.

Teachers feel supported by leaders in their workload. They value the high-quality training they receive. All staff share a common pride in pupils' achievements and celebrate these on a daily basis.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders maintain a strong culture of safeguarding. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and are fully aware of their safeguarding responsibilities.

Staff know pupils extremely well and because of this can spot any small changes that might indicate harm. Any concerns are reported and recorded, with leaders taking swift action when needed.

The staff team works effectively with families and other professionals to ensure that pupils receive the help they need to support their physical and emotional well-being.

Background

When we have judged a school to be 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 April 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	108882
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10255920
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	131
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Claire Stewart
Headteacher	James Waller
Website	www.sunningdaleschool.com
Date of previous inspection	30 January 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Sunningdale is a community special school in Sunderland Local Authority.
- The school caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autism spectrum disorder aged 2 to 11.
- All pupils have education, health and care plans.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has moved into a new purpose-built building.
- Sunningdale school has an established SENhub which provides teachers, parents and carers with training and advice.
- The SENhub is also the venue for an initial teacher training course in partnership with the University of Northumbria for teachers wishing to train to work in specialist settings and provisions.

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.

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher.
- Inspectors met with the local authority representatives.
- Inspectors met with the chair, vice-chair and other representatives of the local governing board.
- Inspectors spoke with two small mixed groups of boys and girls.
- Inspectors also spoke informally with pupils at playtimes and lunchtimes.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, including the single central record of recruitment checks. Inspectors spoke with leaders and staff about training and their understanding of safeguarding.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, including communication and the early stages of reading, mathematics and physical development. For each deep dive, inspectors met with leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector observed different methods of communication, including eye gaze technology, core boards and signing. The lead inspector listened to pupils reading aloud to members of school staff.
- Inspectors reviewed documentation relating to the school's curriculum, along with the school's own evaluation and its development plans.
- Inspectors reviewed planning and assessment documentation linked to pupils' education, health and care plans, including behaviour support plans.
- Inspectors reviewed responses to the staff survey and comments from parents made via Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online survey.

Inspection team

Berni Moorcroft, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

David Milligan

His Majesty's Inspector

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