

Inspection of a good school: Selworthy Special School

Selworthy Road, Taunton, Somerset TA2 8HD

Inspection dates:

20 and 21 June 2023

Outcome

Selworthy Special School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils learn an ambitious curriculum. The 'SPECIAL – supportive, personalised, empowering, creative, inspirational, aspirational, life long – curriculum' underpins the vision and aspirations staff, and those responsible for governance, have for the pupils. Staff know pupils well and care about their well-being. As a result, pupils enjoy coming to school and feel safe.

Pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Staff have high expectations of pupils' conduct. They model these expectations well. Pupils say that when they find things tricky, staff give them space, listen and take time to talk with them about their feelings. This helps them develop strategies to keep themselves regulated. The school, on all sites, is a calm and purposeful place to learn.

Pupils are encouraged to be active participants in their learning. Staff are strong advocates for pupils so they can make themselves heard. Pupils are given opportunities to experience success, as well as being prepared to face challenges that place demands on them in different ways, for example, heightening their emotions and testing their resilience and independence.

Many parents and carers describe the positive difference staff have made to their children's well-being and development.

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

Pupils learn a broad range of subjects split into areas called 'domains'. Domain leaders are knowledgeable about the areas they lead. They identify the important knowledge they want pupils to learn. This is covered across four curriculum pathways known as streams. The streams provide teachers with what they need to meet the diverse needs of pupils. This is more established in core areas such as English. In other domains, leaders have not broken learning down into small enough steps. Consequently, teachers do not have as

much detail about what pupils should learn and what this should look like. This results in some pupils not learning as well as they could.

Leaders have designed a highly effective early reading and communication curriculum. It includes pre-phonics and early phonics to develop pupils' communication. Teachers are confident and supported well through a detailed framework. It provides clear and ambitious expectations for how pupils will learn to communicate and read successfully. Pupils are keen to read and show how they are increasing their early communication skills. Pupils have opportunities to engage with texts and read every day. They enjoy listening to adults read to them. Pupils listen to a wide range of books. Many of these are selected to increase pupils' knowledge in other curriculum areas and awareness of the world around them.

Leaders have evolved a series of systems and processes that support staff to know precisely what pupils need to overcome their barriers to learning. Information captured about each pupil is thorough. Each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan is at the centre of this. Staff structure a bespoke learning provision based on the EHC plan and other important information, such as plans for supporting with challenging behaviour, meeting sensory needs and approaches that are most successful to support communication and increasing independence. This information is vast and, at times, unwieldy. Consequently, some critical information can be overlooked or not receive the necessary priority.

Leaders are knowledgeable about how children learn and develop in early years. There is a significant focus on the transition from home to school, as there is across the whole school, so that children are ready to learn. Leaders make sure that this first part of the day is targeted, and staff have the necessary knowledge to make this successful. Leaders ensure that the early years curriculum is well informed by external agencies such as occupational therapy. As a result, children in early years have a strong start to school.

Secure and nurturing relationships are central to how pupils manage their behaviour and the demands of being in the school environment. The leaders' approach to this is well established and consistent across all school sites. It enables leaders to be swift in their response when pupils need support. This has resulted in a decrease of high-profile incidents because support is given at the earliest opportunity.

Leaders provide a range of wider development opportunities for pupils. Pupils make a difference through their roles on the 'smart school council'. Older pupils talk about their next steps, work experience opportunities and how their learning in school helps to prepare them for this. Learning in the sixth form follows a more vocational approach. Accredited routes prepare students for adulthood. Learning is linked to their own abilities and interests. This ensures successful onward destinations when students move on to their next stage. The sixth form provides students with a real-life environment to learn and practise the skills they are working on.

Leaders have designed a provision at The Cove to enable some pupils to experience learning alongside their mainstream peers. This collaborative approach provides pupils

with a broad and inclusive education which meets their academic, social and emotional needs well.

Leaders provide local governors and the wider trust with relevant information to keep them informed about the school's strengths and current priorities. This allows governors and the trust to give the appropriate balance of support and challenge to continue the momentum of school improvement.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders, including those responsible for governance, monitor safeguarding closely. They have ensured safeguarding is high priority at all three sites. Staff know their responsibilities to report and record any concerns. They receive regular training. Staff know pupils and their families well. This helps them to provide support at the earliest opportunity. Leaders secure the involvement of other agencies where appropriate.

Leaders know the challenges faced by pupils. These are very diverse due to the range of needs and the range of localities pupils come from. Leaders use what they know to adapt the curriculum to address these challenges.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum is not as well developed in some subjects as it is in others. Learning is not broken down into small enough steps of learning. As a result, pupils do not learn as successfully as they could. Leaders need to ensure that they focus on the development of all subjects and that domain leaders have the expertise to do this from Reception through to sixth form.
- Leaders have a wide range of systems and processes in place to ensure they have the necessary information on individuals and groups. At times, the information gathered is replicated and not always easy to manage and access for those that need it. Important information, for example about pupils' needs or effective communication strategies, does not always get the full focus required. Leaders need to make sure that the systems and processes in place are specific, relevant, accessible and efficient to make the best possible impact on how pupils learn and staff workload.

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 predecessor school, Selworthy Special School, to be good in November 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	146698
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10268645
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	182
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	23
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ian Dickson
Headteacher	Mark Ruffett
Website	www.selworthy.somerset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Selworthy Special School converted to become an academy school in January 2019. When its predecessor school, Selworthy Special School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The executive headteacher and head of primary were absent at the time of the inspection.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has joined the Oak Partnership Trust.
- Selworthy is a special school which caters for pupils from the ages of 4 to 19 years. It provides for pupils with profound, specific, severe or moderate learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorder and social, emotional and mental health needs.
- All pupils have EHC plans.
- The school has three different sites: Oakhill, Hazelbrook and The Cove. Oakhill is the early years and primary phase. Hazelbrook is the secondary phase and also has The

Grove, sixth form. The Cove is a satellite provision for a small group of key stage 3 pupils who also access provision at the nearby mainstream secondary school.

- The school uses three unregistered alternative providers.
- 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 head of secondary, assistant headteachers, domain leaders and leads from the trust. In addition, an inspector met with the chair of the local governing body and trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, science and personal social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with domain leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- An inspector listened to pupils read to an adult.
- Inspectors considered how well the school protects pupils and keeps them safe.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school sites.
- Inspectors analysed school documentation, including leaders' evaluations and plans for improvement. Inspectors scrutinised a range of policies and procedures, including those that relate to the curriculum, special educational needs and/or disabilities, safeguarding and behaviour.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and free-text comments. The inspector evaluated responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the pupil survey which was adapted to make it accessible for pupils.

Inspection team

Leanne Thirlby, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Nicolle Deighton

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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