

Inspection of a good school: Exeter House Special School

Somerset Road, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 3BL

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 June 2023

Outcome

Exeter House Special School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Every pupil is seen as individual and unique in this school. Staff understand the specific and complex needs that each pupil has. Through patience, care and understanding, staff help each pupil to make sense of the world around them. Pupils learn to communicate, have a sense of self and an awareness of others. As pupils move through the school, they learn essential skills for independence and adult life.

Pupils arrive at school full of joy and anticipation for the day ahead. Adults greet them enthusiastically. The day follows well-established routines which helps pupils know what to expect. As a result, they are secure and happy. They settle into school life and behave well.

There is a strong focus on helping pupils to communicate. This is so that they can build relationships with staff and make friends. Pupils have very strong bonds with trusted adults in the school. This helps pupils to feel safe.

Staff are determined that pupils will achieve academically to the best of their potential. Teachers constantly look for better ways to help each pupil learn to read, write and understand mathematics. Leaders make sure that staff have the expertise to do so.

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

Curriculum changes in recent years increasingly reflect the very high ambition that leaders have for every pupil. The curriculum is designed to develop pupils' personal, emotional social skills and teach them essential knowledge.

Leaders have set out what pupils need to learn at each stage. Each pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. These plans set out targets for the pupil's development. The curriculum ensures that the school provides what pupils need to achieve these targets. Teachers break down the targets from the EHC plans into much

smaller, manageable steps. This helps them focus on teaching pupils precisely what they need to learn at any point in time.

Leaders have put much time, effort and resources into equipping staff to teach the curriculum in ways that precisely meet pupils' needs. As a result, pupils make notable progress through the curriculum. They learn to interact with adults and other children. They learn to recognise objects, pictures and symbols. They go on to learn essential skills such as how to take care of themselves. They learn to read, write and use mathematics in everyday life.

All through their school experience, staff focus on what pupils need to have to make informed choices about what to do when they leave school. This focus starts in the early years and in the complex needs class. It continues through to the vocational centre. Here, the curriculum is intensely focused on preparing students for independent living and the world of employment. As a result, they are well prepared to move on to their future training courses or employment.

Leaders see reading as key for success in life. They have invested much into training staff how to teach reading effectively. Pupils begin by learning to listen and pay attention. They go on to learn to make speech sounds. Then they learn to recognise the sounds that go with symbols and actions. This makes them ready to learn phonics and so be able to decode words.

Pupils love listening to, and joining in with, songs, stories rhymes and poems. Books are the focus of fun in school. Pupils can often be seen becoming animated about a loved book.

In a similar way, leaders are raising the profile of mathematics as an essential life skill. For example, mathematics is part of when pupils go shopping, cook, or play with shapes. Teachers are beginning to make the most of the mathematics in every experience.

A well-planned set of experiences takes pupils beyond the classroom. Leaders choose experiences that will support pupils' physical development or give them chance to engage with the wider world. For example, pupils go horse riding, or to soft play and swimming. They go on trips to the park, the theatre and local shops.

Teachers set the right personal, social and emotional targets for pupils because they know pupils very well. Teachers are always checking for evidence that a pupil has achieved their next developmental step. They celebrate even the smallest signs of progress, supporting pupils in building confidence and independence.

Such clarity of focus is extending into the academic curriculum. Leaders are looking at ways of using the assessment system to give teachers the same degree of detailed knowledge about pupils' progress in subjects such as English, mathematics and art. Leaders are determined that every pupil will receive a strong academic curriculum as well as the care and personal development they need.

Teachers are very supportive of leaders' drive to improve outcomes for pupils. They value the training they receive, seeing it as leaders investing in them as professionals. Leaders know that staff work hard and do what they can to lighten the workload where possible.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff understand that pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make it difficult for them to communicate if they were being harmed. Therefore, staff are vigilant to the slightest sign of a problem. They record and report any concern, no matter how small it might seem.

Leaders keep a close eye on reported concerns, acting swiftly and diligently. They are tenacious in seeing cases through to ensure that pupils are protected, and families get the help they need.

Safeguarding remains a high priority for staff as students move into the vocational centre. For example, staff are attuned to the new risks students face as they engage more widely with the community.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Work to sharpen the link between assessment information and teaching is very new. Therefore, its impact has yet to be seen, particularly in raising pupils' academic outcomes. Leaders need to ensure that the approach used leads to teaching that matches pupils' academic potential precisely so that all achieve as well as they might.

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, Exeter House Special School, to be good in May 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	141647
Local authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	10256798
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	2 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	170
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	20
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Trevor Branch
Headteacher	Matthew Sambrook
Website	www.exeterhouse.wilts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a special school for pupils with a wide range of severe and complex learning difficulties. This includes pupils with profound, multiple learning disabilities, those with autistic spectrum disorders and with speech, language and communication needs.
- All pupils in the school have an EHC plan and are placed at the school by Wiltshire local authority.
- The school is part of the Somerset Road multi-academy trust.
- The school is organised into four phases (early years, lower, middle and upper school) and separate pathways according to the different needs of pupils.
- When pupils reach the upper school, at approximately age 14, they follow the pathway most suited to them. These include the option of moving to the vocational centre on a separate site.

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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, communication and independence. 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. The lead inspector heard some pupils read to a teaching assistant.
- Inspectors also spoke to curriculum leaders about English, mathematics and art and looked at samples of pupils' work in these subjects.
- 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 wider opportunities for pupils. They spoke to staff about workload and considered the responses from Ofsted's online surveys of staff and Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Sandy Hayes, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Buckton

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