

Inspection of Nexus Foundation Special School

Upper Haysden Lane, Tonbridge, Kent TN11 8AA

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 June 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

All pupils at Nexus are exceptionally well cared for and supported by staff and leaders. Staff are expert in understanding each child's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including their communication needs. Listening to every pupil's voice is a key focus for leaders. Some pupils can express their views through pupil council. For others, leaders make careful use of pupils' individual communication systems, to understand their views about how they want to learn.

Leaders build every pupil a very personalised curriculum. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, for example, follow a holistic, sensory curriculum that fosters their enjoyment of learning. This enables them to interact and to develop personal relationships in a caring and nurturing environment. Other pupils might follow a much more academic pathway.

Leaders and staff plan each pupil's day extremely carefully to enable them to access learning, and the wider life of the school, in a way that works for them. As a result, pupils across the school are motivated and engaged with learning. They persist when they find things hard. They learn to take pride in their successes and achievements.

Enrichment opportunities are very carefully planned. Pupils enjoy weekly forest school, and opportunities to garden in the school's allotment. As pupils get older, they have more frequent opportunities to go off site and to apply the life skills that they have been learning, for example by helping to run the school's off-site café.

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

Teachers, therapists and support staff work to ensure that every pupil gets the provision set out in their education, health and care plans (EHC plans). This support is expertly delivered. To ensure that every pupil receives an ambitious and engaging curriculum that is personalised to their individual needs, leaders have developed five 'learning pathways'. In the pathways, each pupil has an individualised curriculum, based on the targets set out in their EHC plans. These outcomes are then broken down further into smaller steps and shared with all staff, and with parents, through pupils' 'target towers'.

Right from the moment children join the school, leaders ensure a sharp focus on developing their communication and interaction. In Reception, children learn how to play alongside each other and how to interact positively with staff and with their peers. Staff are well trained to help pre- and non-verbal children learn to use picture- and symbol-based communication systems. This enables them to join in with learning and play. As pupils develop the ability to express their views and wishes, leaders and staff take careful account of this when developing their personalised curriculum.

Since the last inspection, leaders have made rapid progress with their early reading curriculum. They have successfully implemented a new phonics programme. Staff have benefited from in-depth training in how to teach phonics and early reading. Leaders use assessment information carefully to identify if a child is developmentally ready to begin phonics. Leaders know that some pupils will need much more practice, over a much longer period, to learn to read successfully. Leaders have worked to raise the profile of reading in the school, for example through their celebration of World Book Day. Work to develop pupils' love of reading is ongoing.

Pathways for some pupils have an increased focus on academic subjects. Since the last inspection, leaders have worked to strengthen the quality of education in these subjects, particularly for the highest attaining pupils. Much progress has been made. Some areas of the curriculum are very strong. For example, art is taught by a specialist teacher with very strong subject knowledge. As a result, pupils develop their proficiency in drawing, painting and sculpture. They explore their ideas and produce high-quality, creative work.

In other curriculum areas, including English and mathematics, leaders' curriculum thinking sometimes lacks clarity. It is not always clear, within the curriculum, what pupils need to learn and in what order. In addition, teachers often teach outside their main area of expertise. Leaders have provided some subject-specific training for teachers. However, this has not yet led to a coherent and consistent approach to teaching in these subjects.

Leaders have created an enriching personal development programme for every pathway. The offer is then further tailored for each individual to build their independence, to develop their life skills and to enable them to develop talents and interests, or to engage with leisure activities. Pupils follow a relationships and sex education curriculum that is appropriately adapted to meet their needs and which helps them to develop their understanding of healthy relationships.

Students in the post-16 provision each have a highly personalised programme. Where appropriate, this includes regular work experience and volunteering opportunities. Leaders work with students and their families to plan the next steps for each student.

Staff are expert in understanding pupils' needs and adapting the way that they deliver the curriculum to take each individual's needs into account. This enables pupils who would otherwise struggle in school to engage very positively with learning. When pupils struggle to manage their behaviour, the expert and multidisciplinary pupil intervention team takes very swift and effective action to support them. Its work is of an exceptional quality.

Leaders take highly effective action to support pupils who do not attend regularly. They recognise that the need for this has increased since the disruption caused by COVID-19. This enables some pupils who have not been attending to reintegrate back into the school.

Senior leaders, and those responsible for governance, share an unwavering commitment to the pupils of the school. They are rightly proud of the school's progress since the last inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that staff understand the additional safeguarding risks and challenges that pupils with SEND face. Staff recognise that they must be additionally vigilant and pay careful attention to what pupils communicate, for example through their behaviour. Any concerns that staff identify are dealt with appropriately.

Safeguarding leads carefully triangulate all known information about pupils. Leaders refer appropriately to external safeguarding partners. Leaders follow safer recruitment procedures. They ensure that all new staff have a thorough induction into the school's safeguarding approach and systems. Pupils learn about keeping themselves safe, including online, through the school's personal, social and health education.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, for pupils on a pathway with an increased focus on academic subjects, leaders have not considered carefully enough the important knowledge that they want pupils to learn. They have not broken learning down into small steps that will enable teachers to teach precisely and ensure success for all. In addition, there is not always a consistency of approach across phases and pathways. As a result, some pupils do not progress through the curriculum as well as they might. Leaders need to continue their work to develop the curriculum, and ensure teachers have the subject-specific expertise to deliver the curriculum consistently and as leaders intend.

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	119050
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10268291
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
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	259
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Helen Norris
Headteacher	Scott Jarred
Website	www.nexus.school.org.uk/
Date of previous inspection	10 June 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Pupils at Nexus Foundation Special School have a very broad range of complex needs. Some have profound multiple learning difficulties. Many have autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school is part of the Kent Special Educational Needs Trust (KSENT), working collaboratively with other special schools.
- The school operates a satellite site for primary-age pupils from Wouldham, All Saints Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School. The pupils integrate into school classes for part of the school day, depending on how much they can manage.
- The school has a nursery. The school is registered to take children from age two. However, children who attend the nursery are predominantly aged three and over. The nursery operates as a screening and assessment centre. Children generally attend for three sessions per week over two terms. After six weeks, a formal

review takes place to determine if it is necessary to request an education, health and care needs assessment.

- The school is not using any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the third routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteachers and the assistant headteachers.
- Inspectors met with a number of governors, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these areas: early reading, communication and interaction, social, emotional and mental health, and the curriculum for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. Within the deep dives, inspectors talked to leaders about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited classrooms, spoke to staff and spoke to pupils about their learning.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders and staff about pupils' learning in other areas, visited some lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. This included English and mathematics.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record, reviewed safeguarding records and spoke to leaders, staff and governors. The inspector considered how well the school manages safer recruitment, and how it manages allegations about adults.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and school development plans and individual care, learning and behaviour support plans.
- Inspectors reviewed responses to the staff survey and responses to the parent survey, including the free-text comments. Inspectors spoke to parents at the gate on the morning of day 2 of the inspection.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Rosemary Keen	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Bzikot	Ofsted Inspector

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