

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Pond Meadow School

Larch Avenue, Guildford, Surrey GU1 1DR

---

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 June 2023

## **Outcome**

Pond Meadow School continues to be an outstanding school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

This is a happy school where staff are focused on 'equipping learners for life'. They care deeply about their pupils, all of whom have complex needs and barriers to learning. Staff understand pupils' individual needs, strengths, talents and interests. They know what pupils need and when. As a result, pupils make exceptional progress in all areas of their education. Ultimately, they are prepared well for what the future holds.

The headteacher and her team have worked relentlessly over the last few years to develop an ambitious curriculum that is focused on pupils' wide-ranging needs. There is no ceiling to what they believe pupils can achieve.

In classrooms, there is a positive energy, where pupils enjoy learning. This was evident through the laughter and happiness the lead inspector saw between staff and pupils. Pupils take an interest in what they learn. Bullying is not something pupils worry about because it is rare, and tackled well if it happens.

Overall, behaviour is excellent. Pupils' behaviour is well understood. There are times when pupils' behaviour gets in the way of their own learning. What is clear, though, is that staff know how to approach these situations, and respond appropriately.

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

'Pond Meadow is a great school. I am really glad I chose it for my child. The staff are wonderful and are experts at working with children with special needs. The children are given such a lovely range of activities to take part in.' This was the view of one parent and carer that echoed the views of so many.

Vital to the life chances of pupils is the curriculum. Over the last few years, it has improved rapidly. Leaders, staff and parents are seeing the very positive difference the revamped curriculum is having on pupils' development.

Pupils benefit from a highly structured curriculum that caters for pupils from early years through to the sixth form. Most pupils have English, mathematics, science, physical education and personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons. These are supplemented by regular topics that touch on different curriculum areas, such as history, music, art and modern foreign languages. A structured way of checking how pupils are progressing towards their targets helps staff to meet individual pupils' needs. Where it is appropriate, some pupils do work experience and some work towards ASDAN qualifications.

Visits to classrooms showed that highly skilled staff use a range of strategies to help pupils. They focus on ensuring pupils use different communication strategies to get across their preferences. While it would be easy for staff to jump in and do it for pupils, they hold back so that pupils develop their communication skills at pace.

Staff have benefited from a range of training, such as using signing and symbols. They use recognised approaches that provide high levels of structure for pupils with autism. One member of staff said, 'The approach introduced by the headteacher has been the best thing to happen to this school.'

Therapy is personalised to individual pupils and integrated into their timetables. For example, in one session visited by the lead inspector, a speech and language therapist was working closely with pupils, supporting their communication and social interaction. Inspectors saw examples of pupils communicating spontaneously with each other, which showed the impact of the school's work.

The teaching of literacy, including phonics, has been well thought out. Staff follow a systematic approach which is successful in encouraging pupils to become readers and writers when appropriate. Leaders have invested in a range of carefully selected books that give pupils variety in what they read and in what is read to them by staff. Pupils are given opportunities to read aloud in class.

While many pupils struggle with communication, there are plentiful opportunities for them to develop in this area. Pupils enjoy social times, and happily play with each other and communicate with staff and peers. The experiences pupils have are carefully planned to make sure they achieve success and become independent and well prepared for adulthood.

Carefully linked to the curriculum is a plethora of trips, visits and experiences. These are all designed to expose pupils to situations where what they have learned in school can be practised elsewhere in a more meaningful way. For example, some pupils practise ordering food and drink in coffee shops, shopping at the local supermarket and using the bus or train safely and independently. The PSHE programme builds pupils' understanding of topics such as consent, healthy relationships and sex education. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a real strength of the school.

Staff enjoy working here. They feel well supported with their workload but also more generally. Staff support each other incredibly well, something which the lead inspector

witnessed first hand during the inspection. Several well-being initiatives, including the work of the well-being team, help to make staff feel valued.

Trustees have an infectious passion. They are committed to making sure Pond Meadow pupils get a good deal. They know the school inside out. They carefully balance holding leaders to account with providing lots of support, something which ensures the highest standards for all.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The culture of safeguarding pupils is very strong. Pupils' significant vulnerabilities are understood by staff, who act proactively to make sure concerns about pupils are passed on. There are clear systems in place that staff use to report concerns. Safeguarding leads are highly knowledgeable and take swift action to ensure the right support for pupils. Recruitment processes are robust. Staff undergo thorough checks to assure leaders of their suitability to work here. Pupils are taught effectively about the risks they may face in their everyday lives and how to tackle them.

## **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 predecessor school, Pond Meadow School, to be outstanding in February 2014.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	141533
<b>Local authority</b>	Surrey
<b>Inspection number</b>	10256562
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	149
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	22
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Alex Page
<b>Headteacher</b>	Emily Hayward
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.pond-meadow.surrey.sch.uk">www.pond-meadow.surrey.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	16 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Pond Meadow School is an all-through special school that caters for pupils with a range of severe and complex learning disabilities and profound and multiple learning disabilities, including complex medical needs. A large proportion of pupils have autism spectrum disorders.
- All pupils have education, health and care plans.
- The headteacher took up her post since the last inspection.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

## 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 held a wide range of meetings with the headteacher, other leaders and teaching and support staff in the school. The lead inspector met with the chair of trustees and two further trustees. He also spoke to the local authority school improvement partner.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these areas: early reading, communication, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also observed some pupils reading and using a range of communication strategies.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View and the free-text comments received during the inspection. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted's staff survey.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors held meetings with safeguarding leads, governors, staff and pupils. They scrutinised the single central record and sampled various safeguarding records.
- Inspectors also took account of a range of other information, including the school's development plans, school policies and minutes of trustees' meetings.

### **Inspection team**

Shaun Jarvis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Linda Jacobs

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](mailto: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/](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2023