

# Inspection of a good school: Fordwater School, Chichester

Summersdale Road, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 6PP

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Inspection dates:

3 and 4 July 2023

## **Outcome**

Fordwater School, Chichester continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if we were to carry out a graded (section 5) inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

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

From the moment pupils join this warm, vibrant school, action is taken to quickly identify their complex needs. All staff are highly skilled at understanding the nuanced ways in which pupils communicate. Each pupil's voice is at the centre of decisions made about their care and education. Pupils' personalities flourish because staff celebrate them as unique individuals. They learn new skills such as swimming, cooking and Japanese 'Taiko' drumming. Pupils practise numeracy skills to weigh ingredients when making batches of delicious cake to sell in the 'Nest Café'. They take enormous pride in marketing and selling products from their numerous enterprises.

Every pupil has a personalised learning journey that is meticulously planned. Leaders prioritise pupils' personal, social and emotional development. Pupils learn to recognise and process their emotions. This restores pupils' resilience when they find learning a struggle.

Relationships are incredibly strong in this school. Pupils treat each other with kindness and compassion because staff role model this behaviour. Pupils state that 'bullying does not happen here'. Education around inclusion and equality means pupils understand that being unkind is wrong. When pupils become dysregulated, staff provide effective and nurturing support. This helps pupils quickly get back to their learning.

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

The 'Fordwater Aims' curriculum is broad and ambitious. Leaders have carefully identified the knowledge and skills that pupils will learn. Knowledge is broken down into small manageable chunks. Learning builds in an orderly way to help pupils make connections between ideas. Teachers use the curriculum to set ambitious learning goals for individual pupils. This means every pupil follows a highly personalised learning plan in line with their education, health and care plan (EHC plan). Coupled with expert teaching, pupils are well

supported to achieve their full potential.

Leaders thread communication and numeracy skills through the entire curriculum. This helps pupils access the rest of the curriculum well. Leaders have developed a pre-phonics curriculum informed by educational research. Pupils learn to discern rhythms and vibrations of different sounds. As many pupils are non-verbal, this helps them to understand how to use sound to communicate. Leaders systematically check when pupils are ready to learn to read. Expert teachers teach pupils to recognise and combine the sounds needed to form words. Pupils experience a rich range of stories and rhymes every day. In early years, children dress up and act out the stories they have been learning about. This helps to make them more memorable. Teachers help pupils choose the books they want to read by using assistive technology. Communication aids are always readily accessible to pupils, and staff take care to listen and explore pupils' views.

An extensive team of health professionals work collaboratively to give all pupils the support they need to learn and develop. Regular training ensures staff have extensive knowledge and expertise to provide a high level of care. Pupils receive imaginative sensory input to help them understand the world around them. When needed, pupils have counselling support for their mental health. Their physical strength is also prioritised through regular exercise in the sensory hydrotherapy pool.

Students in the sixth form benefit from an ambitious curriculum that prepares them well for adulthood. Teachers expertly modify the curriculum, so all students access a rich and broad range of qualifications that provide routes to college or employment. Leaders ensure that pupils receive high-quality, impartial advice to help them plan for ambitious futures. As part of this, students design, make and market wonderful products to sell in school and to the wider public. They compete in 'Dragon's Den' style presentations for funding from local businesses. This hands-on experience raises aspirations for employment in the future.

Pupils enjoy an extensive range of wider learning opportunities. They regularly go out into the community to apply the skills they have learned such as using money to buy items in the local shops. Younger pupils learn the potential risks when crossing roads. Leaders are keen for pupils to 'give back' to the community. Pupils regularly partake in charity fundraising such as donations to food banks. Residential ski trips help pupils learn independence while having fun.

Leaders work with staff to ensure they have the required expertise to help pupils communicate. 'Regulation plans' are constructed to ensure all staff know how to help pupils if they become frustrated. All staff have high expectations of how pupils will behave. They insist pupils treat each other kindly and with respect. A positive and happy culture pervades every aspect of school life.

Staff enjoy coming to work and are highly positive about the purposeful training they receive. Leaders commit a significant amount of time for staff to review the personalised provision for pupils. This ensures pupils are provided with exceptional care from expert staff. Governors are equally committed. They commission external advice to ensure all pupils receive a high-quality, effective education.

## Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide regular training to ensure staff are alert to the signs that pupils may be at risk of harm. Leaders know that some pupils may find communicating their worries difficult. Because of this, there is an increased vigilance to any changes in behaviour that may indicate a concern. Leaders maintain effective communication with professionals working with pupils and their families. The school family support hub signposts parents towards sources of advice and help when needed.

Pupils benefit from a thoughtful personal, social and health curriculum. Through this, they learn about relationships and consent in a way that is appropriate to their age and development stage.

## 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 school to be good in January 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	126163
<b>Local authority</b>	West Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10256550
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<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>	154
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	36
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Roy Hawkins-Dady and Therese Brook (Co-Chairs)
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sophie Clarke
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.fordwatersch.co.uk">www.fordwatersch.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	16 January 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Fordwater School provides education for pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties. All pupils attending the school have an EHC plan.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- 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.

- During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, teachers and support staff. Inspectors spoke to pupils as they visited classes and throughout the school day. The lead inspector spoke with a representative from West Sussex local authority.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and interaction, with a focus on reading and literacy; cognition and learning, with a focus on numeracy; and social, emotional and mental health. For each deep dive, inspectors met with leaders, reviewed curriculum plans and pupils' personalised learning maps, visited a sample of lessons, met with teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and reviewed samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector observed different methods of communication, including assistive technology, e-track boards, communication aids and signing. The lead inspector listened to pupils reading aloud to members of school staff.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors viewed the school's website and policies, met with the designated safeguarding lead, spoke with pupils and staff, checked school records of safeguarding checks carried out on adults working at the school and spoke with governors.
- The lead inspector met with health and medical professionals who oversee the medical care of pupils. The lead inspector also visited the therapeutic spaces and provisions in the school to evaluate how they were used.
- The inspection team considered the views of parents shared through Ofsted Parent View. They gathered the views of pupils and staff through surveys and discussions conducted throughout the inspection.

## **Inspection team**

Michelle Lower, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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