

Inspection of a good school: Southern Cross School

Roundwood Road, Northenden, Manchester M22 4AB

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 September 2023

Outcome

Southern Cross School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a supportive school. The school is ambitious for pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff have high expectations for pupils' educational and personal development. Pupils typically achieve well from their various starting points.

Pupils work well together during lessons. Some parents and carers shared concerns about behaviour and bullying. Occasional challenging behaviour is resolved quickly by skilled staff. The school deals with incidents of bullying effectively. Staff form caring relationships with pupils. Consequently, the conduct of most pupils improves over time.

Some pupils benefit from specialised programmes designed to encourage improved attendance and engagement. For example, the personalised education team provides tuition to pupils at home, online or in the community. Pupils access bespoke qualifications, such as mechanics, boxing and construction.

Pupils enjoy residential trips to, for example, Wales. They enjoy taking part in outdoor education sessions. Pupils also support the work of local and national charities. They visit places of worship, museums, galleries and the zoo. They benefit from participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Pupils bond with and care for the school rabbits, Kevin, Blue and Oreo. These experiences help to improve pupils' resilience and well-being.

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

The school provides pupils with a safe, enjoyable and purposeful learning environment. Pupils, staff and governors understand this vision clearly. The school places pupils' interests at the heart of its work.

The school's curriculum is designed to meet pupils' social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. It achieves this well. Pupils study a broad suite of subjects that lead to useful qualifications. The school ensures that pupils receive regular opportunities to revisit

well-ordered curriculum knowledge. Pupils benefit from helpful support to connect and use this knowledge in different subjects. This helps them to deepen their understanding of increasingly complex concepts.

Staff typically adapt their teaching to meet the needs of pupils with SEND well. Teachers design tasks for pupils that are tailored to their interests. This helps pupils to remember more. Occasionally, the information in pupils' SEND support documents is not sufficiently detailed. As a result, there is reduced oversight about how well these pupils respond to the support provided. This also limits parents' and carers' understanding about the help that their child receives.

Reading is a key priority across the school. The school welcomes pupils who have had significant disruption to their education. As a result, many pupils do not enjoy reading for pleasure. The curriculum introduces pupils to a wide range of exciting and engaging texts. Pupils respond well to teachers who read books to them regularly.

Staff regularly check pupils' progress through the curriculum. This assessment information is used to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge or changing SEND. This is particularly effective for those pupils at an early stage of reading. These pupils are identified quickly and receive appropriate help from well-trained staff. Despite this, some staff have not received sufficient training. Consequently, they do not support pupils as effectively as they could when helping pupils to read and spell in their lessons. This hinders pupils' progress.

Pupils, parents and staff report that low-level disruption occurs. During the inspection, the school was calm and orderly. Staff respond quickly and effectively to any signs that pupils are unsettled. When necessary, staff are well trained to use physical intervention appropriately. The school's records of incidents are robust. Over time, physical intervention has decreased.

The school has impacted positively on pupils' attendance, including disadvantaged pupils. Some pupils benefit from bespoke educational programmes, tailored to their needs. These provide useful remote education to pupils.

Pupils learn about diversity, including about people from different faiths. They are taught to respect the differences they will experience in society. The school provides pupils with a comprehensive careers programme. These opportunities help to prepare pupils well for their next steps in education, employment or training.

Parents' views of the school are mixed. Some parents are unclear about the support and progress of their child. Most parents reported not knowing about the enrichment opportunities that the school offers. Other parents appreciate the care and support that the school provides. There is more work to do to improve communication between the school and parents.

The school ensures that robust checks are completed on alternative provision (AP) used by pupils. Communication between AP settings and the school is strong. This helps to ensure that pupils attend regularly, remain safe and benefit from the AP placement.

Staff benefit from a range of initiatives that support their workload and well-being. They reported that changes to assessment systems allow them to work more efficiently.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some staff have not received sufficient training about the school's approach to supporting pupils at an early stage of reading. As a result, these staff do not support pupils as well as they should to develop their reading and spelling across the curriculum. The school should ensure that staff are suitably trained so that they can help pupils to read and spell with increasing fluency in all subjects.
- At times, pupils' SEND support documents, including bespoke timetables, are not as specific as they should be. Consequently, the school cannot accurately evaluate the progress that these pupils make. The school should ensure that pupils' SEND support documents clearly outline the provision in place and the desired impact so that progress can be evaluated more easily.
- Some parents report that they do not find out enough about the support that their child receives or the progress that their child is making. Many parents are unaware of the wider opportunities that the school provides. Consequently, parents' opinions of the school are mixed. The school should consider ways to engage more effectively with parents so that communication is improved and the work of the school celebrated.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2018.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	105623
Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	10274115
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	9 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	144
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Steve Carroll
Headteacher	Kate Burke
Website	www.southerncross-ebd.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	20 and 21 March 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a special school that provides education for pupils, aged nine to 16, with SEMH difficulties. Some pupils also have autism and other learning needs.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Places are commissioned by local authorities.
- The school is part of the Endeavour Federation. This is a hard federation with Meade Hill school. The governing body is responsible for both schools.
- The school has grown significantly since the previous inspection. Consequently, several staff are new to the school. Changes include the appointment of a substantive headteacher.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- Leaders make use of three unregistered AP settings.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics; personal, social, health and economic education; and English, including early reading. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and reviewed samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector observed some pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- An inspector also reviewed the art and design and science curriculums. He spoke with leaders and evaluated some pupils' work.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, executive headteacher and other leaders throughout the inspection.
- The lead inspector spoke with two members of the governing body, including the chair of governors.
- The lead inspector spoke to a representative of Manchester local authority.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school, at social times and in lessons. They spoke with pupils to discuss their views of the school, their learning, their behaviour and safety.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- An inspector visited an AP used by the school. The lead inspector spoke to other AP leaders by telephone and met with the leader responsible for AP.
- The lead inspector met with the acting SEND coordinators and reviewed samples of documentation relating to SEND.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents shared through Ofsted Parent View. This included the free-text comments. Inspectors reviewed the responses to Ofsted's surveys for staff and pupils.
- Inspectors considered a range of documents shared by school leaders, including the school improvement plan, the records of governing body meetings and reports from external evaluation of the school.

Inspection team

Adam Sproston, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Stephen Ruddy

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
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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