

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Hillside Special School

Hitchcock Place, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 1NN

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Inspection dates:

20 and 21 September 2023

## **Outcome**

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

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

Hillside Special School is a safe, caring place where pupils learn and make friends. Staff warmly welcome pupils as they arrive; pupils are happy and eager to start their day. Pupils who are new to the school quickly settle into school life. This is because staff know pupils' individual needs and backgrounds well. By the time pupils finish life here, they are prepared for their next steps. Where appropriate, pupils go on to study relevant courses at local further education colleges.

Some pupils have had mixed educational experiences prior to starting here. The school works closely with parents and carers. Staff quickly get to grips with the best strategies to support pupils with their emotions or behaviour. As a result, most pupils attend school regularly and behave well. They show empathy and kindness towards staff and each other. Pupils respect each other's differences and value how staff look after them.

The curriculum contains a range of engaging experiences. These support pupils to build their independence and confidence. These include horse riding or the 'Duke of Edinburgh' award. Trips into the community allow pupils to learn important social skills or practise their mathematics. While much of the curriculum is high quality, there are still some areas that need refining.

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

Since the previous inspection report, the school has made significant changes to its curriculum. The curriculum is effectively designed around pupils' individual needs and the important information outlined in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. The curriculum has five key areas that cover the necessary knowledge and skills the pupils need for their future lives.

Overall, the curriculum works well. Most staff have a secure knowledge of what learning activities best support pupils with complex needs. Staff use the information from pupils' 'personalised learning plans' (PLPs) and EHC plans to design lessons and experiences that build on what pupils already know and can do. Staff increasingly use the school's assessment system effectively to help them spot any gaps in learning. Pupils develop well from their differing starting points.

In areas such as communication and language or physical development, the curriculum documentation outlines carefully the small steps forward that pupils need to become successful. For instance, supporting pupils to begin to communicate or to improve their mobility.

However, some curriculum areas are not designed as well as the very best. Some plans do not always have sufficient detail. Other areas, like the phonics scheme, are very new to the school. A minority of staff have not yet got to grips with these curriculum plans. In these instances, pupils do not make as much progress as they should.

Pupils love to read. They learn their favourite stories off by heart. Many lessons have a range of opportunities for pupils to enjoy books. Books and stories are made accessible by sensory activities, rhymes and song. Most staff use the new phonics scheme well. Many pupils are able to enjoy stories for themselves.

The school supports pupils to manage their emotions and behaviour very well. PLPs outline to staff effective individual strategies to use if pupils are finding things hard. Staff quickly de-escalate tricky situations, so pupils can refocus on enjoying their learning. Well-considered therapies through mediums, such as art and music, give pupils further help and support. Consequently, pupils behave well.

The school's curriculum is interweaved with opportunities for pupils to learn about the world, different cultures and how their bodies work. The new approach to relationships education teaches pupils, in an age-appropriate way, how to manage friendships and what is safe behaviour. These experiences help to prepare pupils for the world outside. Many parents highlighted to inspectors the positive difference the school makes to their children's lives.

Much has changed across the school in a short period of time. Despite this, staff feel leaders manage their well-being and workload well. Leaders and governors fully recognise the work they still need to do to make school life even better.

## **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 effective training to implement some curriculum areas, like phonics, well enough. This makes learning harder for pupils. The school should ensure that all staff are well trained, so they implement all areas of the curriculum well.
- There are areas of the curriculum where curriculum documentation is not helpful to teachers. In some instances, the documentation does not match the small steps of knowledge outlined in the curriculum plans and assessment system. Therefore, there is not enough information to help teachers choose the most effective activities to support pupils' learning. The school should ensure that all curriculum documentation supports teachers to choose effective activities that help all pupils to learn well.

## 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 school to be outstanding in January 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](#)' 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	124903
<b>Local authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	10288476
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	86
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	1
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Becca Frances
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lizzi Murphy
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.hillsidespecial.org.uk">http://www.hillsidespecial.org.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	7 March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The deputy headteacher is currently the acting headteacher.
- Many leaders have changed their roles to support the acting headteacher during the headteacher's absence.
- The school caters for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities and severe learning disabilities. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection of a serious incident involving a child who used to attend this school that had occurred since the previous inspection. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the incident were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

## 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Due to the nature of the specialist curriculum, inspectors carried out deep dives in the following areas: communication, language and reading, personal and social development (including relationships and sex education) and physical development. In each area, inspectors met with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils and looked at evidence of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector also reviewed curriculum documentation relating to knowledge and understanding of the world, including mathematics.
- Inspectors viewed the curriculum through a range of pupil case studies. Inspectors scrutinised EHC plans and 'personal learning profiles' from a sample of pupils across different classes.
- The lead inspector held discussions with members of the governing body, including the chair and with a representative of the local authority.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The lead inspector scrutinised the school's behaviour systems, pupils' behaviour support plans and logs of behaviour incidents.
- Inspectors spoke to a range of pupils from different classes across both days of inspection.
- The lead inspector considered the 35 responses made by parents to Ofsted Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, including 35 free-text responses. The lead inspector also considered 58 responses to Ofsted's survey of staff.

## Inspection team

Damian Loneragan, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Bessie Owen

His Majesty's Inspector

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