

Inspection of an outstanding school: New Horizons School (Part of the Sabden Multi Academy Trust)

Beauchamp Road, St Leonards-on-Sea, East Sussex TN38 9JU

Inspection dates:

18 and 19 October 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.

The principal of this school is Ross Maryan. This school is part of the Sabden Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Jo Foulkes, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gill Sole.

What is it like to attend this school?

Almost all pupils at New Horizons School have previously experienced significant disruption to their education. Once settled, pupils typically appreciate the support and guidance that they receive from teachers, pastoral and support staff. Pupils' individual circumstances are known well and are responded to in an increasingly unique manner by the school. This applies to learning needs as well as behavioural and emotional needs, barriers to learning and school attendance.

In conversation with inspectors, older pupils reported that, in lessons, behaviour is generally good. Inspection evidence supports this view. While there are examples of noisy, upset or anxious behaviour, and use of offensive language, pupils told inspectors that they feel safe. Pupils understand and respect each other's social, emotional and mental health needs. They are confident that adults know how to help and take action when needed.

Staff are ambitious for what pupils will learn, and qualification pathways are available. However, pupils' achievement is not consistently strong across different subjects. Pupils benefit from a range of wider personal development opportunities. For example, prefects, identifiable by their smart blazers, play a key role in supporting younger pupils. Pupils of all ages particularly enjoy the opportunities to learn outside the classroom, in the local environment and further afield.

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

Turbulence in staffing, challenges with recruitment, and changes at trust level have all impacted on the school's improvement work. Leadership at trust and school level is now secure, although some significant roles are newly recruited. Swiftly, leaders have secured the total confidence of the wider staff team. Staff at all levels feel supported. They report that their workload is manageable. Collectively, the school is rightly prioritising improvements to the curriculum, behaviour management and pupils' attendance.

The school has considered pupils' learning requirements in response to their social, emotional and mental health, as well as wider needs. Consequently, pupils benefit from a curriculum that is focused on preparing them for their future. The school prioritises developing pupils' resilience. This is accompanied by careers information and, for older pupils, preparation for adulthood lessons. This helps to build pupils' social, independence and problem-solving skills. Through these lessons, pupils also increase their understanding of diversity, the wider world and expand their own ambitions.

Teachers consider carefully what pupils should learn and what activities will best facilitate learning. They assess pupils' understanding and knowledge through discussion and questioning. Consequently, teachers successfully tackle misunderstandings and identify next steps in learning. In some subjects, there is insufficient consideration of pupils' sequential learning through subjects over time. For example, work in mathematics books across the lower, middle and upper school reveals both repetition and gaps in learning. By contrast, in other subjects, including art and design and physical education (PE), pupils' learning builds effectively, and they achieve well.

Teachers select texts to support learning, or to read aloud to pupils, with care. Nevertheless, reading is not sufficiently organised through the school. The youngest pupils learn phonics and read aloud frequently, but their access to other reading books is not yet well developed. Older pupils, who are still at the early stages of learning to read, do not receive sufficiently planned support to help them catch up quickly. Training in a new phonics scheme to be implemented across the school has recently commenced. Specialist support, from within the trust, is being provided to ensure that a strong culture for reading is embedded.

Pupils typically behave well in lessons. However, learning time is lost as some pupils are frequently absent. Ensuring good attendance is a high priority. The school works flexibly and with determination to identify and overcome barriers to attendance. Other pupils miss lessons when they are too upset or not ready to learn. Staff provide extra support to help pupils regulate their behaviour and to get back to lessons as quickly as possible.

Over time, physical restraints on pupils have been commonplace and suspensions from school frequent. A new, more flexible, approach to behaviour management is contributing towards the school's warm and positive ethos. The new approach is responsive to pupils' individual and differing needs, focusing on positive reinforcement and on resolving upsets calmly.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Inspection evidence indicates that systems and practices to ensure that pupils are kept safe have strengthened significantly over the last year. Staff at all levels are trained, are vigilant and know how to act in the face of concern. Pupils' individual circumstances are known well and are responded to proportionately and with care.

Records relating to concerns generally contain helpful information with sufficient detail. However, this is not always the case. Therefore, records may not provide consistently useful information for staff to manage or respond to a concern promptly and effectively.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the curriculum does not identify and order the knowledge that pupils should learn. Consequently, pupils do not acquire new knowledge and skills equally well in different subjects over time. The trust should ensure that, in all subjects, the curriculum builds knowledge in a coherent way, across phases (and key stages), so that pupils are prepared effectively for their next steps.
- Support for pupils, in the middle and upper stages of the school, who need help to catch up with reading is not systematic. This means that some pupils may not acquire skills needed to access the curriculum as well as they could. They may miss opportunities to engage positively with texts and to develop a love of reading. The trust should ensure that the action plans to strengthen the teaching of reading across the school are implemented as planned.
- School staff, pupils and parents are not positive about the school's long-established approach to managing behaviour. This approach has not resulted in improved pupils' behaviour. The trust should ensure that all staff are trained in the newly agreed approaches to behaviour management, and that the new behaviour policy and practices are clearly shared with pupils and their parents.
- Too many pupils fail to attend school well. These pupils miss vital opportunities to learn and to prepare for their futures. The trust should continue its extensive endeavours to ensure that all pupils on the school roll receive an appropriate full-time education.

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, New Horizons School, to be outstanding in July 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

Unique reference number	142151
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10288055
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special
Age range of pupils	6 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	83
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gill Sole
CEO of trust	Jo Foulkes
Principal	Ross Maryan
Website	www.sabden.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	25 April 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- New Horizons School is part of the Sabden Multi Academy Trust. A new chief executive officer of the trust took up their post in September 2021. A new principal of the school commenced in post in September 2023.
- The school caters for pupils aged six to 16 with social, emotional and mental health needs. All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school currently uses three registered providers of alternative provision.
- 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.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

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