

Inspection of an outstanding school: Ifield School

Cedar Avenue, Gravesend, Kent DA12 5JT

Inspection dates:

1 and 2 November 2023

Outcome

Ifield School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders at all levels want 'only the best' for pupils at Ifield School, and this is reflected in all aspects the school. Pupils are warmly greeted as they arrive. Staff are nurturing and supportive. They are determined that every pupil gets the support they need to fully participate in school life and to experience joy and fun throughout the school day. This can be seen in singing assembly, for example, where adults support pupils to sing and sign, or to move in time to the music.

Pupils enjoy their enriching and ambitious learning. Teachers, support staff and the school's therapy team work together to ensure that each pupil's strengths, needs and next steps are fully understood and planned for. Pupils show great enthusiasm in their lessons and demonstrate high levels of resilience when learning is challenging. Pupils are proud of their successes and achievements.

Right from the start of early years, all staff work to raise pupils' aspirations and expand their horizons. Pupils enjoy the wide range of enriching experiences that the school provides. Through the school's art curriculum, for example, pupils have opportunities to be involved in a range of performances. Recently, staff and pupils worked with a local theatre company to create and perform 'A Dragon's Destiny'.

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

Leaders at all levels are determined that every pupil will have a broad, engaging and enriching curriculum that provides them with the foundations they will need for the future. To achieve this, leaders have developed ambitious learning pathways. Those on the 'sense' and 'explore' pathways follow a highly personalised curriculum underpinned by their education, health and care (EHC) plan. Those on the 'discover' and 'innovate' pathways learn in small groups and classes. They follow a curriculum that is more closely aligned with the national curriculum. For these pupils, teachers adapt learning skilfully to ensure that pupils' individual next steps are intertwined with the planned curriculum.

Additional support from the school's therapy and intervention teams ensure that all pupils make excellent progress towards their individual EHC plan targets.

The curriculum for early years has been carefully adapted to take account of the fact that children start Reception at an earlier developmental stage. The school's director of therapy has worked very closely with educational leaders to design a curriculum that places communication and interaction, the development of children's personal and social skills and children's physical development at the heart of the curriculum. Staff have been trained to understand the very small steps in learning that children need to make in these areas.

Assessment of children's starting points is precise and ensures that staff know exactly what to focus on next. Staff know children extremely well, and design learning very carefully to capture and hold their attention. Staff cleverly engage children in nursery rhymes and songs, for example by cracking eggs that represent Humpty Dumpty, extending the waiting time, and sense of anticipation, for children just slightly on each repetition. Children's delight as they learn to engage with those around them is palpable.

The immersive communication environment that leaders at all levels have created is visible throughout the school. Many pupils will remain at an early stage of communication throughout their time at Ifield School. Leaders ensure that all pupils continue to receive expert, targeted teaching. Those who can verbalise are supported to develop their speech. Those who are not yet speaking, or who do not express themselves through speech, are supported to develop appropriate methods of communication. This enables all pupils to more fully engage with the world around them and helps to keep pupils safe as they know how to ask for help.

Staff ensure that all pupils are exposed to engaging stories throughout their school day. Staff adapt their storytelling approach to align with pupils' individual needs. Pupils take great joy in sensory stories and staff reading stories in character. Expert teaching of phonics ensures that those pupils who are able to learn to read get exactly the right teaching and support. As a result, these pupils make very strong progress in learning to read. For fluent readers, leaders have developed a sequence of increasingly complex texts that support their developing comprehension.

Pupils' personal development sits at the heart of leaders' vision. The school has developed a highly effective curriculum for relationships and sex education, which is precisely tailored to individual pupils' developmental stage. Pupils experience a range of purposeful trips and visits. The school offer residential trips, including a skiing trip in Italy, so that pupils feel increasingly confident in what they can do. Having recognised that many pupils did not feel confident about life after school, the school has developed a very clear careers programme. This programme has a very positive impact on pupils' aspirations.

Leaders at all levels ensure that staff receive ongoing training and support so that staff feel confident and expert in their roles. Many pupils need a high level of support from the staff around them to regulate their emotions and to communicate their needs. As a result of the training that leaders provide, staff know how to provide pupils with the most

effective support. Governors know the school very well. They ensure that, as a board, they have the right knowledge, expertise and training to carry out their role effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 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](#)' 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	119040
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10287932
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	274
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	50
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Sparks
Headteacher	Madeleine Arnold-Jones
Website	www.ifieldschool.com
Date of previous inspection	1 May 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for a broad range of SEND, including profound and multiple learning disabilities, severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and autism. All pupils on roll have an EHC plan. All pupils are placed by a local authority.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The headteacher was appointed in January 2022. Prior to this, she was the head of school.
- The school's sixth form is based at North Kent College, Lower Higham Road, Kent DA12 2JJ.

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 met with the headteacher and the leadership team. The lead inspector met with representatives of the school's governing board, including the vice chair of governors, and spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and interaction, early reading, mathematics, understanding the world and science. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors discussed the curriculum for some other subjects, including personal, social and health education, with leaders.
- 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.
- Inspectors considered pupils' behaviour and attitudes throughout the inspection and discussed the school's analysis of pupils' behaviour and attendance with leaders.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Caroline Clarke

Ofsted Inspector

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