

Inspection of a good school: Cedar Hall School

Hart Road, Thundersley, Benfleet, Essex SS7 3UQ

Inspection dates:

31 October and 1 November 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good 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?

Pupils are enthusiastic about the things they are learning. Pupils' communication skills develop significantly over time. However, in some areas of their learning, pupils are not as well supported to develop their knowledge and understanding. Some say that they would like more help to learn. Others say the work is too easy.

Pupils are safe and happy. They like coming to school. They say it is very easy to make friends. Pupils know that staff will help them if they have any problems or concerns. Pupils are supported by staff who know them well and are vigilant to their individual needs.

Most pupils learn a range of strategies to support them to manage their feelings and behaviours. Consequently, pupils successfully access their learning. As they get older, pupils become good role models to younger pupils.

Pupils enjoy the broad range trips and visits they go on. Many experience highly successful residential trips that they have never felt confident to attend previously. An increasing number of pupils are taking on responsibilities in the day-to-day running of the school, such as in the school council.

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

Over the last year, the school has worked to further develop the planning and organisation of the curriculum that is available to pupils. The school is thinking carefully about how the curriculum helps prepare pupils for adulthood. Curriculum planning and staff delivery is of a better quality in some subjects, for example in music. However, in

several areas many changes are either new or not fully embedded. In these areas, curriculum planning and staff training do not guide staff sufficiently as to the precise content and concepts that pupils should learn. Staff often choose the content that pupils are going to cover. Leaders do not know enough about what pupils are learning in these areas.

Staff support individual pupils' needs effectively. For example, pupils with the most complex early communication needs get high-quality and specific support. Staff who work with these pupils are routinely trained by external specialists. These staff skilfully support pupils to practise language and communication throughout the school day.

Staff do not always accurately identify what pupils know and can do. For example, leaders are developing the English curriculum. They have ensured that there is a reading programme to support pupils in the early stages of learning to read. This programme is not fully implemented. Staff training is in its early stages. The books that pupils receive are not always well matched to the sounds they are learning. Staff prepare activities that are not always closely matched to what pupils already know and can do. This is not helping those pupils who need to catch up as quickly as they could.

Staff are very well trained in the school's approach to supporting pupils' behaviour. Most pupils are kind to each other and learn strategies to manage their emotions and behaviour.

The school's life-skills curriculum and programmes ensure that there are tailored opportunities to help pupils to prepare for adulthood. Over time, pupils successfully make friends, take part on a range of residential trips, and gain work experience in line with their interests and aspirations. Pupils access careers education. They go on to appropriate education, training, or employment when they leave. Pupils are very confident about how staff help them to become young adults.

The curriculum for personal, social, health education (PSHE) ensures that pupils access the broad topics required by statutory guidance. However, the issues related to curriculum planning in other subjects are apparent also in PSHE.

Almost all parents are overwhelmingly positive. Typically, staff are positive about working at the school. They value the support they receive from leaders and feel that leaders are considerate of their workload. A significant minority of staff are less positive about their training, workload and the guidance for those teaching older pupils.

Leaders and governors bring a wide range of expertise and experience. They have managed adeptly the range of significant changes since the previous inspection, including managing an extensive new build on the school site. They monitor a broad range of areas. However, they do not use all the information they have at their disposal to ensure that they are being as effective as they can be, especially but not exclusively in improving some pupils' poorer attendance.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school is transitioning to a new online safeguarding system for record-keeping. Staff are not always using this system with the rigour that leaders intend. As a result, although pupils get the right help at the right time, the record-keeping of some of this work is not as well documented in the school's chosen recording system as it should be.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some areas of the curriculum are not precisely planned, delivered, assessed or monitored. This includes in the delivery of early reading. Teachers make decisions about the content that is taught without sufficient training. Leaders do not know precisely what is being taught. Some pupils receive activities that are too easy or too hard. The school should ensure that curriculum planning, staff training, assessment and monitoring processes check accurately that pupils make the progress in the curriculum of which they are capable.
- Leaders' and governors' monitoring only provides leaders with a partial picture about where they can be more effective. Some monitoring is time intensive but does not support leaders to identify and make sufficient in-roads in improving provision for individual pupils. Leaders and governors need to ensure that their monitoring identifies where they could be timelier and more effective in supporting some pupils, especially in breaking down the barriers to poorer attendance.
- The school safeguards pupils effectively. However, some recent record-keeping related to this, since changing recording systems, is not as well maintained. The school's quality assurance systems have not identified this. The school needs to make sure that checks to ensure that all records are thoroughly maintained are embedded in staff training and school monitoring.

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 October 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' is used to mean pupils with 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	115457
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10269002
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	176
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Debbie Braithwaite
Headteacher	Nicholas Maxwell
Website	www.cedarhall.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils have a range of needs, but, most notably, they have moderate learning difficulties.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no children of Reception age accessing the school's provision.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider for a very small number of pupils.
- 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.

- 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 held discussions with leaders. Inspectors also spoke to a local authority officer and met with several members of the governing body, including the chair and vice-chair.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in these subjects: speech, language, communication and early reading, mathematics, PSHE and music. 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 also heard a selection of pupils read with an adult.
- 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.
- Staff and pupils were not given access to complete Ofsted's survey for pupils and staff.
- To gather evidence about pupils' experiences, inspectors observed them at different times during the school day, spoke to them during free times, and met with groups of pupils.
- To gather the views of staff, inspectors reviewed three letters from staff, and spoke to groups of staff during the inspection.
- The inspector also took account of 34 responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including comments in the free-text facility.

Inspection team

Kim Pigram, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Nicola Shadbolt

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
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