

Inspection of a good school: Grove House School

Sawyers Hall Lane, Brentwood, Essex CM15 9DA

Inspection dates:

5 and 6 December 2023

Outcome

Grove House School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Lisa Christodoulides. This school is part of SEAX Trust, a 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 (CEO), Ruth Sturdy, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sally Lockyer.

What is it like to attend this school?

As pupils progress through the school, they become confident and develop their independence skills as a result of the school's ambitious expectations. They learn to communicate more clearly and cope with a range of different challenges. Pupils expand their vocabulary and improve the clarity of their speech due to the strong focus on speech and language therapy. They leave with a range of relevant qualifications.

Pupils are enthusiastic about the different activities beyond the core curriculum. All pupils take part in some way in the annual drama production. There are lots of different clubs on offer at lunchtime, including for signing, arts and sport.

There is a strong sense of community, with older pupils supporting younger ones. For example, the sixth form raised money by organising a Christmas sale for other pupils to buy presents for friends and family.

Pupils are very well behaved, and disruption in class is rare.

Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe both out and about and when online. They feel safe and know adults whom they can talk to if they are worried. The personal, social and health education programme is flexible in order to focus on any particular issues that may arise, for example about consent.

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

The school has a well-planned, detailed curriculum that is ambitious for what pupils can achieve in the subjects they study. Leaders have thought carefully about pupils' needs.

Expanding pupils' vocabulary is core to every subject. Staff check on pupils' understanding and adapt activities to help them understand new learning. As a result, pupils learn and understand more over time.

The school has carefully considered the core knowledge that pupils will learn in subjects such as geography, so that they can be successful in living in modern Britain. They consider and compare different cultures and ways of life.

Systems for teaching reading are strong and well matched to pupils' age. Pupils are guided to choose the right books for their stage of learning to read. There is a wide range of appropriate books. English lessons are based on core texts, chosen well for challenge. This includes the works of Shakespeare, but also other books linked to pupils' interests, such as a book about superheroes.

The school is clear with staff that 'every interaction can be an intervention'. Some staff do this to an expert standard every time they chat to a pupil or work with them in class. They focus on improving vocabulary, giving pupils time to think and encouraging their independence in completing pieces of work. Some staff are at an earlier stage of doing this effectively, sometimes prompting pupils too soon. As a consequence, some pupils are not as independent as they could be.

Bespoke packages are in place for individuals who have particular interests, enabling some to achieve different GCSEs. This offer is not fully understood by some families. The school knows that there is work to be done in helping pupils and their parents and carers to understand what qualifications pupils are working towards and why. The school is continuing to develop the breadth of the curriculum offer.

There is a focus on building pupils' independence at all stages of the school. Pupils demonstrate this in their everyday activities, with many independently leaving school at the end of the day to find their transport. Pupils are polite, welcoming and well behaved. They listen carefully to teachers and work hard.

Pupils receive appropriate careers guidance. They learn about useful skills, such as how to read an Underground map. The school provides sixth formers with opportunities to practise work skills by running a small shop. The COVID-19 pandemic created challenges for the school in developing external work experience opportunities, but leaders have made this a priority moving forward. All pupils move on to appropriate education placements.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has three strands to its work: academic, therapeutic and social/emotional. The teams work together to ensure that pupils get the support they need, including for needs outside the core focus on speech and language. This ensures that support is joined up, and pupils make good progress in both their academic and personal development.

There are well-developed systems for monitoring trends in behaviour, attendance and safeguarding. The school works closely with families to improve attendance when it is at risk of not being good enough.

Staff feel well supported in the school. All staff benefit from regular training in aspects of the school's practice. They are positive about the work with, and support from, the multi-academy trust, for example for subject groups. These enhance teachers' specialist subject knowledge.

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 yet developed the expert skills in interacting with pupils that others have. This means that pupils are sometimes prompted too soon or not supported to develop new vocabulary as well as they might. The school needs to ensure that all staff continue to develop these skills to support pupils to be independent and to develop a wide vocabulary, so that this is done to an excellent level.
- The curriculum is not as broad as it could be. For example, the design and technology offer could be extended. This means that some parents and pupils feel that they could have more choice in what pupils study or the qualifications they gain. The school needs to continue to develop the curriculum to be aspirational and varied, working with families to enable them to understand this offer.

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 June 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	141945
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10288541
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	128
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	29
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sally Lockyer
CEO of trust	Ruth Sturdy
Headteacher	Lisa Christodoulides
Website	www.grovehouseschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	6 and 7 June 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This school is for pupils with speech, language and/or communication needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is part of SEAX Trust, a multi-academy trust.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

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 had 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 school leaders. They met with subject leaders and teachers. They also met with members of the local governing body, the chair of trustees and representatives of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics and physical education. For each subject, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, looked at pupils' work and spoke with teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors visited a range of lessons in other subjects and looked at curriculum plans.
- 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.
- Inspectors considered the 49 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They also considered the 50 responses to the Ofsted survey for school staff.

Inspection team

Tessa Holledge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Clare Gammons

Ofsted Inspector

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