

Inspection of an outstanding school: Cuckmere House School

Eastbourne Road, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 4BA

Inspection dates:

23 and 24 January 2024

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 Jim Cameron. 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?

A warm and vibrant welcome awaits everyone who attends this inclusive school. Positive relationships build on a culture of mutual respect and ambition to support pupils to thrive, both socially and academically. All pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs. Staff know what these needs look like for each pupil. Thoughtful support and clear routines help pupils to understand what staff expect of them. Where needed, staff provide additional help to remove barriers that could limit how much pupils learn or prevent them coming to school regularly. Consequently, pupils are kind and respectful. Classrooms are happy, calm and studious places to learn.

Pupils learn a large range of subjects. They achieve a range of qualifications that prepare them well for college and employment. Qualifications in construction inspire many pupils to learn 'a trade' when they leave school.

Preparation for adulthood starts early. Pupils learn to take care of their personal health, safety and welfare effectively. They enjoy preparing healthy meals, sewing and learning to manage finances. Guest speakers from a wide range of professions enhance the comprehensive careers guidance that all pupils receive. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for a bright and successful future.

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

There is a shared vision among staff and leaders of how to support pupils to be successful. The school has constructed an ambitious curriculum to prepare pupils with the skills and knowledge they need. This also includes pupils who attend Tower House, which provides specialist support for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. In most subjects, the knowledge that pupils need to know has been carefully identified and ordered in a sequential way. There has been consideration of how knowledge builds across the primary and secondary phases. This helps teachers to check for gaps in knowledge. Most teachers use detailed curriculum information to make sure pupils go back and recap and practise important learning. However, in a small number of subjects, learning is not always considered precisely enough to help pupils revisit important concepts. This limits how well pupils develop a secure understanding. Leaders are in the process of reviewing parts of their curriculum to refine these aspects.

Teachers receive effective training to help them plan lessons that promote thinking. Well-developed support plans detail the strategies that pupils need to help them learn. Teachers use a range of teaching methods to help pupils visualise ideas. For example, they use counters to practise multiplication tables. In many subjects, this helps pupils to remember learning over time and go on successfully to achieve well in some national examinations.

Primary pupils learn to read very well. Staff provide effective phonics support for those pupils who are learning to read. Through this, younger pupils are becoming confident and articulate readers who have a love of books. This precise teaching is now being provided for older pupils in the secondary phase. However, the secondary staff providing this support have only recently been trained. This means gaps in secondary pupils' reading skills are not yet consistently addressed. This also hinders how confidently they can read and write in other subjects.

Prior to joining Cuckmere House School, many pupils found it more difficult to manage their behaviour positively when in school. Because of this, every member of staff knows the importance of consistently setting a culture of high expectations through establishing effective, supportive routines. Pupils learn the language they need to express and manage their emotions very well. At breaktimes, pupils and staff enjoy playing games like pool and football together. These everyday interactions build trust and a strong rapport. Pupils report feeling very safe and happy in school.

Leaders recognise that some pupils struggle to attend school well. This impacts on their learning and engagement with education. Leaders have improved their partnership with local services to support pupils who do not attend well. This has started to have a positive impact on some pupils' attendance.

The school places priority on pupils' wider development. An extensive range of opportunities provides pupils with a chance to make a positive contribution to society. The large eco-council collaborates to make the school more environmentally friendly. A range of trips and weekly 'learning outside the classroom' visits helps pupils to practise learning such as map reading when trying to plan a route or journey.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Reading support for pupils in the secondary phase is not yet fully embedded. This hinders how well some pupils acquire the skills and knowledge they need to become fluent readers and writers. Leaders should continue to realise their ambitious plans to strengthen this provision so that all reading support is as effective as it is in the primary provision.
- Improved partnerships with local services are not yet fully effective in improving the attendance of pupils who regularly do not attend school. These pupils miss out on vital learning, which risks them disengaging further from education. Leaders must continue to work with professionals and services to ensure that the attendance of identified pupils increases.

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, Cuckmere House School, to be outstanding in November 2012.

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	142146
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10296421
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	6 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	81
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gillian Sole
CEO of trust	Jo Foulkes
Principal	Jim Cameron
Website	www.sabden.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	17 July 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Cuckmere House School is part of the Sabden Multi Academy Trust. A new chief executive of the trust and a new principal of the school took up their posts in September 2021.
- Boarding provision for pupils ended in September 2019.
- 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 is comprised of three sites. Pupils can attend the largest site, Cuckmere House. Tower House is a key stage 2 and 3 provision for 16 pupils. The Unit is an off-site workshop operated by the school where secondary pupils learn construction and carpentry.
- The school currently uses two registered providers of alternative provision for a 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 met with the chief executive officer of the trust and with the chair of the board of trustees. Inspectors also met with the trust's head of education for primary and secondary.
- Inspectors visited each of the three sites to visit lessons, speak with pupils, meet teachers and look at a range of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with a wide range of school staff, including the principal, vice and assistant principals, and leaders of the upper and lower school phases.
- The lead inspector held a remote meeting with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English, science, physical education and geography. 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. An inspector listened to some pupils read aloud to familiar adults. In addition, the lead inspector sampled pupils' learning across the curriculum, including mathematics and personal, social and health education.
- 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 spoke with pupils about their experiences of school life. Inspectors took account of the views of parents, carers and staff through conversations and responses to Ofsted's surveys.

Inspection team

Michelle Payne, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Deborah Gordon

Ofsted Inspector

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