

Inspection of Chatten Free School

Rickstones Road, Rivenhall, Essex CM8 3HH

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 March 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Early years provision

Insufficient evidence

Sixth-form provision

Insufficient evidence

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The head of school is Adam Dean. This school is part of the Hope Learning Community, 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, Gary Smith, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mike Andrews.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils join the school having faced educational challenges. They may have spent considerable time at home, leading to setbacks in their development. Fortunately, the personalised care and curriculum pupils receive at Chatten Free School restores pupils and parents' confidence in education.

Pupils embrace the school's routines. They give them a sense of security. Feeling secure prepares pupils for learning. Also, having staff who understand how to predict and prevent sometimes challenging behaviours means pupils are generally calm and happy. Over time, pupils learn to trust their key staff. This allows pupils to persevere with challenging activities and move around the school safely.

Pupils make remarkable progress. Most start school with limited communication skills. Through specialised techniques, pupils learn to independently communicate their wishes and feelings. When they are ready, pupils learn to accept boundaries. Pupils learn, for example, to express the word 'no' and to accept the word 'no' from key staff. This enables staff to sensitively steer pupils away from their usual activities and interests. Over time, pupils' worlds widen to include horse riding, swimming, trampolining and a residential trip. These new, exciting experiences prepare pupils for future challenges.

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

The trust and local authority established the school to cater for pupils with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have been successful in managing the school's expansion. Their creative thinking enabled them to compile an innovative curriculum that works exceptionally well. Leaders' care for pupils, parents and staff does not go unnoticed. Pupils' faces light up when interacting with those running the school. Parents and staff have faith in school leaders to continually develop and improve the provision. Such strong relationships ensure that everyone buys into the school's vision. This helps to foster pupils' happiness, independence and respect.

Communication threads through each pupil's individualised curriculum. It facilitates the practice pupils need to progress. The school deploys various symbol- or gesture-based approaches to aid this. They always find one that is the 'right fit' for each pupil. Detailed, regular training means staff have expertise in this area. They understand, for example, how to move pupils on from requesting objects to requesting movement with objects. For instance, blow bubbles, massage feet or throw the ball. If a pupil is ready, staff teach them the sounds letters make. Otherwise, staff use rhymes, songs and books to promote pupils' love of sounds and stories.

Accurate assessment underpins the teaching of the curriculum. Thorough documentation avoids staff having to guess what a pupil should learn next. Considered training supports staff with arranging activities that appropriately

challenge pupils. How leaders and teachers deploy staff adds to this. One member of staff may teach a pupil. Meanwhile, another member of staff may observe the interaction. This individual then records the frequency and/or duration of a pupil's engagement. Leaders work hard to ensure how staff assess is efficient and effective. Staff are positive about this aspect of their workload. They appreciate how assessment captures the small, but important, steps of progress pupils make.

Leaders maintain strong oversight of attendance and behaviour. They build positive relationships with families to address historical attendance and behavioural issues head-on. Flexible timetables successfully support pupils transitioning back into education. These plans include specific, measurable, and time-limited aims. This ensures a steady increase in school attendance and calm conduct.

The main aim of the personal development programme is to prepare pupils to access the community. Staff ensure pupils first learn essential safety measures while in school. Pupils learn to respond to their names, hold hands with staff, and stop when needed. Moreover, staff create deliberate opportunities to prepare pupils for real-life experiences. Interactions with the school dog address some pupils' phobia of animals. Accessing the in-house dental surgery allows pupils to learn to trust healthcare professionals. These experiences and more, serve to broaden pupils' horizons. In time, this helps them and their families handle experiences outside of school that were once difficult to manage.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	148543
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10295136
Type of school	Special
School category	Free school 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	72
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	3
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mike Andrews
CEO of the trust	Gary Smith
Headteacher	Adam Dean
Website	www.chattenfreeschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	19 May 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school received a pre-registration inspection on 19 May 2021. The school was deemed likely to meet all the relevant independent school standards when it opened as a free school for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. The school then opened in September 2021. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is registered to have children in the early years and students in the sixth form. However, at the point of inspection, there were few pupils on roll in these phases. Therefore, due to insufficient evidence, amnesty has been granted for the judgement of both the early years and the sixth-form provision.
- The school is close to capacity. The trust and local authority recognise the risk of having the school go above its published admissions number where the facilities were designed to cater for 75 pupils with complex needs.

- The school does not make use of alternative provision.
- The school reasonably interprets the Gatsby Benchmarks to meet 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

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 meetings with leaders, including the chief executive officer, chair of trust, a local governor, head of school, assistant head for lower school, assistant head for upper school, the head of SEND strategy and innovation for Essex County Council, and the lead education adviser for the Essex virtual school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these areas of the school's curriculum: functional communication, functional movement, and daily life skills. For each deep dive, inspectors held meetings about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, and looked at a sample of pupils' documentation.
- 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 gathered evidence about pupils' school experience by observing their learning, play and interactions with staff and peers. During these observations, leaders and staff were present to support pupils' verbal and non-verbal communication and to ensure pupils felt comfortable being around an unfamiliar adult.
- Inspectors took account of the 68 responses to Ofsted's staff survey, along with the 36 responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also held discussions with several members of staff.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Michael Williams

His Majesty's Inspector

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