

Inspection of Vermont School

Vermont Close, Off Winchester Road, Southampton, Hampshire SO16 7LT

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 June 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils who join this school have had challenging experiences of education previously. At this school, they feel safe and secure as they become part of the 'Vermont family'. All pupils at the school have an education, health and care plan. Pupils appreciate that their teachers get to know them as individuals and understand their needs.

Although pupils are cared for well, they do not always learn as well as they should. Lessons are often disrupted because behaviour is not always managed effectively. Classrooms do not always provide the calm orderly learning environments which pupils need to be able to focus and achieve.

Unkind behaviour and prejudicial language sometimes happen at the school. However, it is dealt with when it happens and is not tolerated by leaders. Pupils feel safe at school and know they can speak to an adult if they are feeling worried.

Pupils enjoy a range of lunchtime clubs such as football, art and gaming. Although these have been introduced recently, they are already popular and participation is high. Pupils benefit from these activities because they provide opportunities for them to develop their social skills and build positive relationships with their peers.

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

Leaders have ensured that there is a planned and sequenced curriculum at the school in an appropriately broad range of subjects. Some of this curriculum has been developed recently and is still being embedded. The school introduced a phonics programme in September. Although this is being delivered well, the school is still developing its approach to identifying and supporting struggling readers. In all subjects, teachers assess how well pupils are learning. However, they do not always use this information to ensure that their lessons are ambitious and challenging enough.

When lessons are focused, pupils benefit from the curriculum on offer. However, disruptive behaviour is too common due to a lack of embedded routines for learning. This prevents pupils from making as much progress as they should.

The number of violent incidents at the school has increased recently. Physical interventions by staff are sometimes used to keep pupils safe. Although carried out proportionately, leaders rightly recognise the need for these interventions to be reduced through more effective de-escalation and management of behaviour across the school. Similarly, the number of suspensions is high and could be reduced if more serious behavioural incidents were prevented. The school is taking action to address this. Leaders have introduced a new behaviour policy and are training staff in its application. Although it is too early to see the full impact of this work, there are initial signs of a positive impact.

To support pupils' personal development, they learn about important topics such as healthy and appropriate relationships. Pupils are also taught about how to manage and communicate their emotions, helping them to become more moral and responsible citizens. Like the rest of the curriculum, this part of the school's offer is not as effective as it could be because pupils are not always focused on their learning.

Although overall attendance figures are similar to national averages, there are still too many pupils who are persistently absent. The school is working to reduce this number and has strengthened its attendance systems.

The school has experienced some disruption to its leadership and staffing over the course of this academic year. This has had a negative impact on the quality and consistency of education pupils have received. The governing body and local authority have commissioned interim support for the school's leadership team. This temporary arrangement has ensured that the school is beginning to make necessary improvements. Most of the school's governing body are new to their roles. They have quickly established an accurate understanding of the school and take an active role in supporting and challenging leaders. The school is part of the Aspire Community Trust and has made use of support from local English and mathematics hubs when reviewing the curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Not all staff are clear about the importance of maintaining appropriate physical boundaries with pupils. This was identified during the inspection, and the school has acted quickly alongside the local authority to ensure that additional training is delivered.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Routines for managing pupils' behaviour are not well embedded and understood by staff. This sometimes results in the unnecessary escalation of behavioural incidents. Leaders should continue their work to establish the new behaviour policy and ensure that all staff are trained to apply it effectively. This will help to ensure that behaviour does not escalate and reduce the need for physical interventions and suspensions.
- Teachers do not demonstrate a secure understanding of effective teaching approaches. Activities are not always well chosen, and transitions between tasks are sometimes disorderly, leading to lost learning. The school should provide further training so that all teachers have a clear understanding of effective teaching strategies and classroom routines.

- Information gathered through assessment is not always used well to adapt learning for pupils. Leaders should ensure that teachers understand how to use information about what pupils know to ensure that lesson content is sufficiently challenging and ambitious. This will help to ensure that learning activities are always purposeful.
- Until very recently, staff have been frustrated by a lack of clear vision and direction in the school. Leaders should continue to engage meaningfully with staff, developing clearer systems and processes where needed. This will help to motivate staff and lead to more consistent experiences for pupils.

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

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| Unique reference number | 116625 |
| Local authority | Southampton |
| Inspection number | 10296246 |
| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Foundation special |
| Age range of pupils | 5 to 12 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 56 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Sam Chapman |
| Headteacher | Matthew McLoughlin-Parker |
| Website | www.vermontschool.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 25 January 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- Vermont School is a special school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Many of the pupils in the school also have a diagnosis of autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- Vermont School is a member of Aspire Community Trust, a cooperative trust in Southampton.
- The school's headteacher was not available during the inspection. Along with the local authority, governors have put in place interim support for the school's leadership team by appointing an external consultant.
- The school uses three alternative provisions, two of which are unregistered.

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.
- The inspectors spoke with a range of leaders about their areas of responsibility, including the deputy headteacher and an external leadership consultant currently providing support to the school. The lead inspector also spoke with representatives of the local authority, local governing body and Aspire Community Trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: personal development, religious education and communication, including early reading. 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.
- 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.

Inspection team

Chris Ellison, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

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