

Inspection of a good school: Southfield School

Woods Avenue, Hatfield, Hertfordshire AL10 8NN

Inspection dates: 9 and 10 July 2024

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 be outstanding 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?

The school helps pupils to overcome historical challenges to their education. As a result, pupils rebuild their confidence. Caring and dedicated staff know how to bring out the best in pupils. This helps pupils to listen, learn and get along with their peers. The school also restores parents and carers' faith in the education system. They appreciate the school's tenacity in the way it advocates for their children with external partners. All parties working together aims to ensure pupils are happy and safe.

The school provides pupils with clear strategies that help them to regulate their behaviour. For example, each pupil has a personalised plan for what they can do independently and what support they need during lunchtime. This helps them to make healthy food choices and prepares them for playing with peers. Pupils enjoy being rewarded for following school rules, such as helping peers or greeting friends politely. As a result, the school day features polite interactions, focused lessons, and a calm, happy environment.

The school has excellent facilities. Pupils are especially proud of the new playground equipment the school let them select. It includes various climbing frames, sunken trampolines, and what pupils affectionately call the 'spinney thingy'. These additions make social times enjoyable and help pupils to make friends.

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

The school radiates an atmosphere of enthusiasm and excellence at every turn. Leaders have worked hard to create a culture of 'critical friends'. This approach ensures the maintenance of high standards and positive attitude towards change. Governors strike a balance between supporting and challenging the school. This encourages continuous improvement and growth. It makes the school an inspiring place for pupils to attend, parents to visit, and staff to work.

In recent years, there has been a seismic shift in the aspirations the school has for its pupils. For example, before the new leaders took up post, very few pupils could read. The introduction of a rigorous phonics programme changed this. Now, more and more pupils can read books. Many choose to read as a strategy to self-soothe when they feel overwhelmed. For pre-verbal pupils, staff use picture-based communication systems to good effect. These allow pupils to show their knowledge of letter sounds and word meanings.

The school curated its curriculum to meet the unique needs of each pupil. It worked alongside external subject experts to do this work, engaging in projects to share expertise and learn from others. This approach has led to quick and lasting improvements in teaching. For example, in mathematics, new well-considered plans, complementary resources, and effective assessment techniques have reduced staff workload and improved pupils' achievement.

The school excels in identifying and supporting pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders oversee a multifaceted approach. It includes targeted therapies, comprehensive planning and robust review systems. These ensure each pupil receives the personalised support they need.

Thorough transition processes are in place when pupils join and leave the school. These prepare pupils for any changes with care and precision. An example of this is the 'All About Me' book which helps pupils feel confident in their move to their next school. This captures each pupil's strengths and pinpoints their difficulties. It also outlines the planned strategies to help pupils overcome challenges. This ensures that pupils are not held back. So, pupils can achieve their highest potential.

Staff nurture each pupil's self-esteem. They listen to pupils and advocate for their right to feel safe and valued. Pupils receive effective support when things go wrong and praise when things go right. This helps pupils to manage their emotions and persevere with challenging tasks. The clear 'behaviour charter' has brought about significant improvements to pupils' behaviour. Staff reinforce the charter's expectations throughout the day. This helps pupils to remember and follow the rules and routines. Careful scripting of language and known consequences for unsuitable behaviour keep classrooms and corridors calm and orderly.

The school supports pupils' wider development through various strategies. Personalised 'tray time' activities support pupils' sensory and mental growth. Hands-on experiences, like making slime, foster turn-taking and strengthen pupils' muscle movements. The school prioritises listening to pupils' views, through the junior leadership team, for example. It uses this to improve the school and local community. During a school trip to the local area, pupils saw litter in the streets surrounding the school. They responded by creating posters and organising a litter pick. This showed their pride in their community. These aspirations come from attending a clean, tidy, and well-resourced school. Because of this, pupils now expect the same standards in their own lives.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 third ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good 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	130362
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10345273
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	87
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Peter Hebden
Headteacher	Angela O'Rourke
Website	www.southfield.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 July 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is designated for pupils with learning difficulties, including autism, global development delay and speech, language and communication needs. However, the school works with the local authority to admit pupils with severe learning difficulties while the local authority searches for a more appropriate educational environment for these pupils.
- The school currently makes use of two unregistered alternative providers of education.

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.
- The inspectors carried out this ungraded inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher, family liaison officer, four governors, a representative from the Hertfordshire virtual school and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and personal, social relationships and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To further inspect the curriculum, the lead inspector met with leaders to discuss science, religious education and physical education. The lead inspector also scrutinised several pupils' workbooks.
- 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 reviewed school documentation, including the school development plan, self-evaluation form, minutes from a meeting of the governing body and evaluative reports from consultants.
- Inspectors reviewed responses to surveys and any hand-delivered correspondence regarding the school. These included 41 responses to the staff survey and 39 responses with 18 free-text responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also held separate discussions with pupils and staff. To ensure pupils felt comfortable and able to communicate, leaders and/or staff were present for inspectors' discussions with pupils.

Inspection team

Daniel Short, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Susan Sutton

Ofsted Inspector

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