

# Inspection of Summerdown School

3 Broadwater Way, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN22 9PZ

---

Inspection dates:	28 and 29 January 2025
The quality of education	<b>Outstanding</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Outstanding</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Outstanding</b>
Early years provision	<b>Outstanding</b>
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The head of provision of this school is Karen Sitwell-Cook. This school is part of The Southfield Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Kirsty Eydmann and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Margaret Neal. There is also an executive principal, Penny Kershaw, who is responsible for this school and one other in the trust.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

The school's core values are the golden threads that underpin the provision that pupils receive. Over time, pupils develop the capacity to show these values of independence, confidence, enjoyment, participation and determination. In doing so, they meet the school's relentless ambition that pupils will leave here ready for the next stage in their lives.

Pupils are independent and confident communicators. They have a range of well-planned activities to practise these vital social skills. These include seaside trips to 'ALFIE' the caravan. During these trips, pupils work together to complete a range of tasks, such as cooking and cleaning. This helps to develop their life skills.

Pupils flourish because they attend this transformative school. They have a wide range of communication, sensory and medical needs. Some pupils have life-limiting and degenerative conditions and receive intensive, specialist care. Despite these complex needs, the school has the highest ambition for what all pupils will achieve and experience. These ambitions are realised. Central to this work is the excellent relationships between pupils and staff. Expertly trained staff know pupils' needs exceedingly well, and pupils trust that staff will take care of them. Pupils consistently follow the rules and routines that adults set. Pupils work well together and show genuine care and compassion towards each other.

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

The school's ambitious curriculum is meticulously mapped out into precise learning steps. It encompasses the essential areas of learning for pupils. This includes English and mathematics, as well as communication and personal development. The school has identified every aspect of knowledge and skill that pupils need to succeed. This knowledge is coherently sequenced from the start of early years all the way through to key stage 4. Staff create 'individual plans' (IPs) that set out the personalised curriculum offer that each pupil will receive. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have their complex needs met with high levels of precision and skill.

Staff are expert teachers of SEND. They know the curriculum they teach very well. Staff have superb knowledge of autism and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Consequently, the support pupils receive across the school is excellent. Staff in the Southfield Centre, supported by onsite therapists and nurses, provide pupils with exemplary specialist care.

Staff put in place highly effective and adapted activities that help pupils to learn how to communicate and read. When pupils arrive, the school rapidly assesses their needs in all areas of the curriculum. These checks continue to take place regularly for pupils, from early years onwards. Staff use the information from these checks to put in place bespoke provision to help pupils to close gaps in their knowledge and achieve well.

Pupils achieve exceptionally well. They show this, for example, in their secure knowledge of early mathematics and phonics. Strong impact of the school's work is also seen in pupils' confident use of their communication, social and life skills.

The school's offer is enhanced by the brilliant personal development provision. Most pupils come here with little understanding of the world around them. The school's robust teaching of life, social and thinking skills enables pupils to recognise who they are and what their place in the world is. Pupils learn how to be part of a community, many for the first time, by learning to respect that people are different and may not think the same way as them. Pupils are well prepared for their next stage. Children in the early years learn the concept of moving from one space to another. Over time, this extends to more complex transitions to prepare pupils for more notable life changes.

Pupils' conduct is exceptional. They consistently show a love and enthusiasm for learning. They use their own communication methods to clearly express their likes and dislikes and do so respectfully. On the rare occasion that pupils struggle to manage their emotions, staff provide effective support. Every sensory and physical aspect of the school has been carefully considered. Classrooms and therapeutic areas provide the optimum learning environment for pupils.

Staff receive high-quality and specialist training to meet the needs of pupils. They are passionate and motivated by the vision of the school. Staff know that their views are valued by school leaders and acted upon. Leadership at all levels is highly adept. Governors, trust leaders and school leaders work well together to ensure that the school provision is of the highest quality. They are driven by the same aim that pupils who attend this school will leave here well prepared for the future.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	149138
<b>Local authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10379943
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy free school special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	161
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Margaret Neal
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Kirsty Eydmann
<b>Headteacher</b>	Penny Kershaw (executive principal), Karen Sitwell-Cook (head of provision)
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.thesouthfieldtrust.com">www.thesouthfieldtrust.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	20 June 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school is part of The Southfield Trust.
- The school caters for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities as well as pupils with autism. All pupils have an educational, health and care plan.
- The school currently makes use of one unregistered alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met with the executive principal, head of provision and other members of the leadership team.
- The lead inspector met with the vice chair of the governing body and one other member. They also met with the CEO of the trust.
- The lead inspector met with a representative from the placing local authority.
- The inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at evidence of pupils’ learning.
- The inspectors observed pupils’ behaviour around the school and in lessons. They also communicated with pupils, supported by staff.
- The inspectors considered a range of documents, including leaders’ evaluations of the school, their school improvement plan and minutes from governors’ meetings.
- The inspectors considered parents’ and carers’ responses to Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments.
- The inspectors took account of the views of staff through conversations and the responses to the online staff survey.
- 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.

## **Inspection team**

Nina Marabese, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

Gavin Thomas

His Majesty’s Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2025