

Inspection of a good school: Sunnydown School

Portley House, 152 Whyteleafe Road, Caterham, Surrey CR3 5ED

Inspection dates:

19 and 20 October 2021

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this initial (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a full inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a full (section 5) inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are highly respected and nurtured. Staff care deeply about them. The much-valued pastoral team is always on hand. For some pupils, attending Sunnydown means that they can enjoy school for the first time.

Pupils' opinions matter. One significant example of this is the positive 'restart' system, 'REST', designed and used by pupils as a strategy to get the time and space they need to ready themselves for learning.

The school has a calm and friendly atmosphere. Pupils' perceptions about bullying are paramount for staff. Adults have received recent additional training. They take issues that arise seriously and tackle them effectively.

Beyond the school's 'traditional curriculum', it prioritises supporting pupils to develop diverse skills, qualities and attributes. The wonderful and intricate landscaped garden and industrious cycle repair workshop are just two of the visible markers of the curriculum offer beyond traditional subjects.

This school is largely successful and often transformative in its aim to empower its pupils. Its work to improve pupils' resilience and develop their character, confidence and self-esteem is deeply embedded. However, academic expectations and opportunities for some pupils could be higher and broader. Some parents and carers believe this to be the case, and inspectors agree.

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

This is a school with notable strengths. Leaders and staff share a passion about what the school aims to achieve. The successful promotion of pupils' mental health and well-being threads through all the school's work.

Pupils who struggle or lack confidence to communicate are nurtured and empowered to speak out. They gain the qualifications and attributes to move on to meaningful future education placements. However, the school's academic offer could be stronger.

Despite successful improvements made in some areas, there has not been a sharp enough focus on academic subjects. Training and professional development opportunities for leaders and staff have not addressed this important aspect of education. It has not been a focus for leaders when monitoring the school's work.

There are weaknesses in the thinking and planning about what pupils should be taught and when within subjects. In mathematics, for example, there is no consensus about the teaching of different methods for calculations. These issues lead to variability in the quality of education pupils receive.

The school does not teach the full national curriculum. There is no opportunity for formal study of a modern foreign language. Leaders have not ensured that required content within computing and music are fully covered.

Where subject plans are more precise, teachers emphasise important learning points and check carefully that pupils understand them. Teachers demonstrate and explain clearly for pupils how to be successful with a given task. In many cases, teachers' subject knowledge is strong. However, these positive features are less evident when what pupils are supposed to learn is unclear. At times, what happens in daily lessons does not link to subject plans, creating gaps in pupils' learning.

Staff know pupils well. Adults successfully create a supportive environment where pupils can actively participate. Many pupils show a keen interest in their lessons and often behave superbly. The support of the pastoral team means disruption to lessons is minimised.

The rich and varied 'Friday curriculum' exposes pupils to a wealth of useful learning. Where the COVID-19 pandemic has halted activities, leaders are determined to reintroduce opportunities as soon as they can.

The culture of reading is strong. Pupils are introduced to a rich range of material. Pupils who have struggled in the past are helped to overcome these hurdles. Very few pupils are at the earliest stages of learning to read. On entry, the school prioritises prompt assessment of any issues and responds with appropriate support.

The united staff team is unanimously proud to work at Sunnydown. Leaders take deliberate and thoughtful steps to alleviate unnecessary workload and promote staff well-being.

In discussion with the headteacher, the inspectors agreed that the school's anticipated work to sharpen the focus on the academic curriculum alongside the successful promotion of pupils' wider development may usefully serve as a focus for the next inspection.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Sunnydown's strong safeguarding culture is underpinned by a well-established and systematic approach. Staff are well trained, alert to risks and confident about how to respond to possible worries. Close oversight by leaders ensures that causes for concern are not overlooked. Leaders are prompt to consult other professionals for advice and support where needed. Similarly, parents and carers are well informed and consulted about safeguarding matters. The school's policies and approaches take specific account of both the local context and safeguarding pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils do not have the opportunity to study the full national curriculum to which they are entitled. Leaders should ensure that all pupils, unless they are individually exempted in their own best interests, have the opportunity to learn a modern foreign language at key stage 3. Leaders should also ensure that every subject covers the relevant content of the national curriculum fully, particularly music and computing.
- There has not been a sufficiently sharp focus on improving the rigour of academic subjects. School improvement strategies have focused on how subjects are taught without due consideration of what is taught. Leaders should redress this balance and ensure that continuing professional development opportunities for staff and leaders focus on improving curriculum thinking and subject planning.
- Specific detail about what the school intends pupils to learn and in what order has not been planned consistently well across all subjects. The school should make sure that the content of teaching within each subject is carefully selected and taught in a coherent order so that pupils develop detailed knowledge and capabilities across the curriculum.
- The oversight and quality assurance of the quality of education is underdeveloped. Leaders should sharpen the focus of their monitoring and evaluation to check the success of the steps taken to improve curriculum planning and that the intended curriculum is enacted effectively across the school.

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 a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in July 2016.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	125458
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10203125
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	88
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Teresa Parkinson/Kevin Webster (co-chairs)
Headteacher	Paul Jensen
Website	https://www.sunnydown.surrey.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 and 13 July 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005, deemed section 5

Information about this school

- The school ceased its residential provision at the end of the previous academic year.
- The school makes use of one registered alternative provider and no unregistered alternative providers.
- This school is designated for communication and interaction needs. Most pupils have a diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors held meetings with governors, the headteacher, other leaders, staff and pupils. An inspector spoke with a representative of the local authority.

- The inspection team took account of the views expressed in inspection survey responses submitted by 11 pupils, 28 parents and 15 staff.
- To understand the quality of education provided by the school, the inspection team carried out deep dives to examine certain subjects in detail. This inspection included deep dives in English, mathematics, citizenship, and personal, social, health and economic education. Associated activities included speaking with leaders, teachers and pupils, visiting lessons, reviewing subject documents and plans, and looking at pupils' work.
- Inspectors probed different aspects of the school's safeguarding arrangements with leaders, staff and pupils. An inspector reviewed safeguarding records, including the single central record of vetting checks about the suitability of adults.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Frances Nation

Ofsted Inspector

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