

# Pathfield School

Abbey Road, Pilton, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 1JU

## Inspection dates

27–28 March 2019

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Outstanding</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	<b>Good</b>

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- Since the last inspection, leaders have made bold and difficult decisions to ensure that the school maintains a good quality of education.
- Significant changes to the leadership team and organisation of staff have led to some roles being unclear.
- As a result, some planned improvements have not moved forward at the pace leaders would like. For example, partnership work across the two sixth-form sites remains at an early stage.
- Subject leaders are yet to fully define their responsibilities to ensure that planned changes, including the teaching of reading, are implemented effectively.
- Throughout this recent unsettled time, staff continue to put pupils first and to promote high expectations for them. They invest time in working with parents and carers, alongside a range of agencies, to secure the best possible conditions for learning.
- The curriculum is designed effectively around pupils' needs. Adaptations to learning are made effectively to ensure that pupils make good progress towards their personal goals and aspirations.
- Teachers gather evidence and use assessment well to plot pupils' improvements and to target their next steps. Most teaching is effective, as learning is relevant to pupils' precise needs.
- Routines in the early years classes support children to settle and meet high expectations. Activities are carefully chosen to extend and deepen understanding. However, the space and the learning resources outside do not support good learning experiences for children.
- Sixth-form students and their families are supported effectively to prepare for their future lives. As a result, students leave school with well-thought-out and strongly supported pathways for their futures.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding. Staff support pupils to attend well, communicate well and behave appropriately.
- Positive relationships and well-organised environments enable pupils to feel, and to be, safe and secure in school.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders, including governors, need to ensure that:
  - the new leadership roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood so that agreed areas of improvement, for example about how reading is taught and how pupils' progress is assessed, are driven forward
  - planned improvements to develop resources, particularly in the outside area for children in the early years, are effective in providing better-quality learning experiences
  - staff across the different parts and sites of the school, for example across the two sixth-form sites, secure the best possible outcomes for pupils by sharing their practice and working together more closely.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The new headteacher and the governors have a good overall understanding of the school's strengths and areas to improve. Preparing pupils for adulthood by 'inspiring interaction' is a clear ambition which permeates the school. Staff are ambitious for pupils and even the smallest successes are celebrated loudly. Therefore, pupils grow in their confidence to relate to adults in school and this supports their achievements towards their goals.
- Recent changes to the leadership team structure mean that leadership roles across the school are currently under review. Leaders' roles and responsibilities are emerging but are not yet fully understood by staff. In addition, staff from different parts of the school and across the different sites do not consistently share their strategies for supporting pupils. Therefore, opportunities are sometimes missed to make further improvements to the quality of education.
- Staff development needs are identified by senior leaders, and extra training put in place. As a result, staff are motivated, and the majority say they are well supported in their roles. Monitoring activities to check the quality of teaching have lessened during the period of leadership changes over recent months. This, alongside the changes being made to leadership roles, means that some middle leaders do not have a clear current picture of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching and learning across the school.
- However, there are well-understood systems for creating individual learning plans and these underpin how well pupils succeed. Plans set out clearly what pupils need to focus on next. Work to improve partnerships with parents means that parents are increasingly brought into conversations throughout the year to discuss and agree pupils' next steps towards their desired outcomes. The home school diary successfully supports daily conversations between school and home.
- Individual learning plans support the good progress of disadvantaged pupils. Leaders allocate additional funding according to individual needs and review this each term. Case studies provided by the school show that the extra support that pupils receive improves their communication skills, and that this helps them to catch up with their peers.
- Over time, leaders have ensured that the school looks outward, to learn from others, to continue to improve teaching. The school has links with other similar schools and with local mainstream schools. This encourages staff to build their expertise by working collaboratively with other professionals, both from special and mainstream education within their community. As a result, staff have good knowledge of the different strategies and programmes available to support pupils' wide-ranging needs.
- Leaders work positively with a range of therapy support professionals so that pupils can access these as needed. The school nurses employed at the school support staff well to address pupils' wide and often complex medical needs. Pupils enjoy taking the therapy dog out on visits and walks. These additional services contribute well to pupils' personal development.

- The curriculum enables pupils to learn across a broad range of subjects using different approaches according to their learning and sensory needs. Staff record how well pupils have understood the curriculum aims set for each lesson. Leaders check that, over time, these assessments show that the curriculum is relevant for each pupil. Timely changes are made to the curriculum planning for pupils as needed. This supports pupils to make good progress in the curriculum areas taught.
- Opportunities to learn about, respect, and celebrate different cultures occur throughout the year. Themed events and visits within the community support pupils' understanding about, and respect for, how different people live. A link with a school in Uganda is displayed and discussed with pupils, to help them to appreciate and understand that there are different cultures.
- Parents appreciate the care and attention provided by staff. All who expressed a view said that their child is taught well and makes good progress. Parents describe how well staff understand pupils' needs and can communicate and motivate their children. Many parents recognise the impact this has on their child's future, a typical comment being, 'We could not be happier as parents, we can now integrate into society because of what the school has done for our very special son.'

## **Governance of the school**

- Governors have the experiences and skills they need to provide effective challenge to leaders. They are increasingly rigorous in checking the accuracy of the information presented by leaders. For example, governors are now looking more precisely at the impact additional funding, such as pupil premium, has on pupils' outcomes than they have previously. This helps to ensure that extra provision for disadvantaged pupils is chosen effectively and makes a difference to pupils' outcomes across the school.
- Since the previous inspection, governors have made some tough decisions about how to manage the finances of the school. They have done this carefully, keeping the needs of pupils at the heart of their decision. However, the changes made have inevitably led to an unsettled time for staff at the school.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff know pupils very well. There is a culture of being observant and vigilant to ensure that pupils are safe. Staff make meticulous observations of changes in behaviour that could indicate any concerns. There are clear and understood procedures for reporting concerns about pupils' safety or welfare. The safeguarding policy meets current requirements and is published on the school's website. Training covers a wide range of areas to ensure that staff have the information they need to keep pupils safe.
- Leaders work with a wide range of professionals; for example an educational psychologist attends school frequently to promote all aspects of pupils' welfare. Leaders seek advice and additional support to ensure that everything is put in place that can be to keep pupils safe.
- Governors' oversight of safeguarding is effective. They understand their responsibilities and hold leaders to account. For example, the safeguarding governor makes visits to

the school to check that staff understand vital safeguarding messages delivered in training.

- The procedures in place to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children meet requirements.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

**Good**

- Teaching enables pupils to make good progress towards their personal targets and goals. Staff build a picture of pupils' cognition and learning, communication and sensory needs, using the education, health and care plan (EHC plan) and discussions with parents and professionals.
- Case studies and work seen in pupils' books and folders show how teaching over time leads to individual success stories, for example a pupil joining in with activities when they previously could not, a pupil having the confidence to walk independently for the first time, students moving onto a college course to study an area they are interested in. As a teacher described, staff help pupils to 'rewrite their script'.
- An individual learning plan for each pupil identifies the most effective learning styles to be followed, the level of support needed, and the method of communication to be provided. Precise and appropriate targets are set for pupils' next steps. Teachers use this information to provide effective lessons and learning activities for pupils. Staff use precise language and careful questioning to guide pupils' learning. There is a strong emphasis on practical and visual learning and this helps support pupils' understanding.
- Staff build positive relationships with pupils and this helps them to grow in confidence and increasingly engage with their learning and with their friends. For example, lunchtimes are structured and supported so that pupils enjoy this time and can freely engage with each other using their developing communication skills.
- A school priority this year has been to improve pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts by applying them more often across areas of the curriculum. Evidence of this can be seen around the school with practical mathematical resources and visual prompts used to support pupils' understanding. For example, pupils cooking Easter biscuits were supported to use mathematical language to do with weighing.
- To ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment continues to be good across the school, leaders have introduced different ways of collecting the evidence of pupils' progress. This is because they want a clearer overview of how well pupils across the school make progress. In addition, leaders have introduced research projects to explore strategies used in the teaching of phonics and early reading. This is to ensure that staff have a clear understanding of the most effective methods to support pupils' reading skills. It is too soon to see the impact of these new approaches.
- New middle leaders are wisely forming plans to ensure that staff work together more closely and to share their practice more often, for example to bring staff from different parts of the school and from the two different sites regularly together to share teaching and learning approaches.

## Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. This is because of the quality of care and security that staff provide. Staff do all they can to understand the challenges that pupils face and to find ways of supporting their preparation for their future lives.
- There is a firm focus on building pupils' confidence and self-esteem. The tiniest of successes are noticed and valued. This encourages pupils to communicate and to move forward in their learning.
- Pupils learn how to be safe in their local environment through the regular trips and activities outside. Staff ensure that, as appropriate, pupils take part in learning how to travel within the community and how to keep themselves safe while doing this.
- As pupils move to key stages 4 and 5, pupils and their parents are supported effectively to identify their steps towards adulthood. Destination plans take pupils' views about what they would like to achieve in their future employment into account. Pupils' ideas about how they want to live their lives socially and where they would like to live are also part of the plans. This helps students and their families to be aspirational, and to seek solutions, as they look to the future.
- Pupils feel safe and parents who expressed a view all agreed that their children feel safe at school.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Because pupils feel safe, secure and positive at school, they want to attend regularly, and the majority do. Staff encourage pupils to learn to communicate with their peers and with visitors to the school. There are regular visitors from local mainstream schools to provide useful opportunities for pupils to read together and socialise with other children.
- Staff provide clear expectations and explicit examples of appropriate behaviour, often supported with visual symbols and/or signing. Therefore, pupils show respect for others as they move around the school and during lessons.
- For pupils who need extra support to manage their behaviours, detailed plans are in place. These are reviewed and changed as pupils' social skills change. Leaders check records of behaviour and liaise with staff to secure the best possible arrangements and strategies to support pupils.
- Briefings provide staff with updates about key strategies being used so that everyone can take responsibility for helping pupils to behave well. As a result, the school has seen a dramatic reduction in more serious behaviour incidents.
- Pupils want to learn and show positive attitudes towards their learning. This is because staff ensure that lessons support them in being able to understand, and to work out problems, as independently as possible.

## Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' workbooks, plans and observations of their learning show that most pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, make good progress towards their personal targets. This is because the information about how pupils are achieving towards their targets set out in their EHC plans is used effectively to plan pupils' learning. In addition, tasks are broken down into small steps and this also enables pupils to make good progress.
- Leaders are less clear about how well pupils achieve across the school in reading, writing, mathematics and other subjects. This is because the assessment systems have not been in place for long enough for the information to show patterns of achievement for pupils over time.
- During lessons, staff develop pupils' communication skills effectively using a wide range of well-researched strategies. This supports pupils' good achievement across all areas of learning.
- Pupils in the Pathways Centre, many of whom have anxieties and negative attitudes towards learning, achieve well. Staff form positive relationships and provide learning activities that interest pupils. As a result, many pupils improve their attendance and achieve their learning targets successfully. Many develop the confidence and self-esteem that enable them to return to mainstream schools.
- Leaders seek out local community projects to enable pupils to apply and transfer their skills to real-life situations. For example, pupils in key stage 4 work in a community café for part of the week. Here, they develop their social and communication skills as they serve customers.
- As a result of the thorough preparation for pupils' futures and the effective individualised curriculum, most students move on to further education, training or supported employment that meets their aspirations and goals.

## Early years provision

Good

- Leaders ensure that full and detailed information is gathered about each child, well before they start at the school. Parents and professionals involved with the child's care contribute to a unique profile that describes how best to support them. This careful planning helps to secure positive transitions to school.
- Additional funding for disadvantaged children is used effectively. As seen across the school, individual plans for disadvantaged children in the early years show the specific resources and strategies to be used. Observations and assessments identify learning needs, so that individual targets and curriculum activities are adapted. Targets are revisited throughout the year to ensure that children, including disadvantaged children, continue to make good progress. As a result, they are well prepared for learning in Year 1 and beyond.
- Teaching considers the specific learning goals identified for each child. This happens within a carefully constructed timetable of routines and consistent expectations.

Children are engaged effectively in their learning because staff know what they enjoy and what stimulates them to learn.

- Because of the challenges they face, some children take time to be able to manage their behaviour. Staff work closely as a team to develop positive interactions, using signing and visual symbols to reinforce messages.
- Teachers place strategies for communication at the heart of their learning plans. This helps children to build relationships with adults and to start to find ways of expressing their wants and ideas appropriately.
- The provision for learning outside is currently under review by leaders and improvement plans are in place. This is a wise move as the space and resources available do not currently support interesting learning for children.

### **16 to 19 study programmes**

**Good**

- Leaders and staff are successful in ensuring that students gain the confidence and skills they need to move on to successful destinations that match their own interests and aspirations.
- Leaders ensure that a key focus is to make every minute count towards preparing students for their next steps beyond school. Close partnership working with parents incorporates ongoing careers advice and events that successfully enable students to discover future possibilities. Destination plans take students' interests and opinions into account. They outline how learning is organised to match students' desired outcomes.
- Core functional skills teaching in reading, writing and mathematics is well matched to students' individual learning needs. Students have targets that are precisely linked to their next steps. They are presented to students in visual and accessible ways that help to make them relevant and real. This contributes to the good progress that students make.
- An emphasis on preparation for adulthood and work-related learning secures students' progress throughout the sixth form. Links with the local community contribute well to this. For example, students take orders for sandwiches from local businesses and deliver these. Local bakeries and other businesses support work experience placements. During these placements, school staff support students and liaise closely with staff to ensure that each student is able to be successful.
- Students support local charities and organisations, such as the National Trust, to learn how to make positive contributions to their environment.
- Staff have high expectations that students develop skills for independent living such as cooking, cleaning and organising themselves. In the kitchen, students take turns to prepare meals, wash up and clean up. This boosts students' belief in their ability to develop their independence.
- Leaders check how well students continue to achieve when they leave the school. They maintain communication with students' college or place of work long after they leave, ensuring that any support needed to maintain successful destinations is provided.

- An improvement priority to bring staff from across the two sixth-form sites together, to work more closely and to share good practice, has not moved forward this year.

## School details

Unique reference number	113638
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10058316

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	All-through special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	143
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	23
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rosemary Mitchell
Headteacher	Cherie White
Telephone number	01271 342 423
Website	<a href="http://www.pathfield.devon.sch.uk">www.pathfield.devon.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:admin@pathfield.devon.sch.uk">admin@pathfield.devon.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	8 March 2018

## Information about this school

- In September 2018, an interim headteacher was appointed and in January 2019 took up the permanent role.
- The school caters for pupils with severe, profound and complex needs including autism spectrum disorder and/or disabilities. The school includes a specialist centre called pathways, which is on the school site, for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The sixth form is split between two sites. A small number of pupils attend the sixth form at the main school site while others attend a nearby site called the Town Station.

- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school is part of a collaborative trust, The SENTient Trust, which was formed in 2012 and includes the special schools in Devon. The school also works in partnership with three mainstream schools that are very close by. These schools have formed an informal partnership called The Pilton Association of Schools.
- An education adviser commissioned by the local authority visits the school regularly. The school also arranges visits from a school improvement partner.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across the school at both sites, alongside senior leaders. A range of pupils' books and folders alongside their individual plans were looked at.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteachers and other leaders, four governors and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors visited the Two Bridges Enterprise café.
- The inspectors also spoke to the school's improvement partner on the telephone.
- A wide range of documents were examined. This included minutes of governing body meetings, the school's curriculum and development plan, records of behaviour and safeguarding documents.
- The 18 views and free-text responses provided on Parent View alongside a letter sent in during the inspection were considered. The views of staff were gathered through the 44 responses to an online survey.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils informally and met with the school council.

## Inspection team

Tonwen Empson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Simon Brown

Ofsted Inspector

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