

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Littledown School

Queens Road, Slough, Berkshire SL1 3QW

Inspection dates:

29 and 30 April 2025

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that aspects of the school's work may not be as strong as at the time of the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Angela Mumford. The school is part of the Specialist Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), also Angela Mumford, and overseen by a board of trustees chaired by Debbie Richards.

What is it like to attend this school?

Many pupils join the school at a low ebb. Prior to joining the school, most pupils have not had positive experiences and some have not attended school regularly. Well-considered transition arrangements help pupils to settle and quickly feel part of the school.

Staff greet pupils with smiles and welcome them into class each morning. This helps pupils to get off to a positive start to the day. Staff build trusting, warm relationships with pupils. They have a strong knowledge of pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities. Over time, pupils develop greater confidence, self-worth and readiness to learn. They are happy here, feel safe and know that staff care about them.

For most of the time, behaviour is calm and orderly. Nonetheless, pupils' needs mean that many continue to need a high level of support to help them manage their emotions. At times, emotions spill over. When this happens, staff provide patient, kind support.

The school is ambitious for pupils. It aspires for them to be successful learners and to develop confidence and positive relationships. However, there are inconsistencies in teaching and other aspects of the school's work. As a result, pupils do not achieve well enough and are not prepared fully for the next stage of their education.

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

The school has been through a challenging period. This includes significant staffing turbulence and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has hampered the school's work to maintain standards from the previous inspection. Changes to teaching approaches and the curriculum have not been embedded in the way that leaders intend. As a result, inconsistencies in the quality of education mean that not all pupils achieve as well as they could.

Reading is a priority and taught daily through a well-considered phonics programme. Staff support pupils well to build their confidence and read with increasing fluency. However, other aspects of the school's approach to English are not as well thought out. There is not enough focus on handwriting and securing basic sentence construction. This means that pupils do not develop their writing knowledge well enough.

Pupils benefit from a broad curriculum offer. Improvements to the curriculum and the teaching of mathematics ensure that most pupils build their knowledge securely in this subject. However, across the breadth of the curriculum, teaching does not consistently take account of pupils' previous learning. Activities are sometimes not designed well enough around what pupils need to learn. As a result, pupils do not build their knowledge in the way that the school intends.

The school makes sure that pupils' needs are identified and understood, including when they first join. Staff interact positively with pupils, taking every opportunity to support their social skills. They help pupils to develop greater self-esteem and to become more resilient when they encounter challenges. Clear routines help pupils know what to expect. This helps to reduce their anxiety. Well-considered, effective support is in place to help those pupils whose attendance is a concern.

Staff are calm and caring when pupils find it difficult to follow the school's behaviour expectations. However, the school's approach to de-escalating rising emotions when pupils struggle to regulate their behaviour is not embedded or fully effective. As a result, a high number of behaviour incidents escalate to the point that staff need to use physical intervention.

The school's well-thought-out wider curriculum offer makes a strong contribution to pupils' social development. Weekly visits to a forest help pupils to learn about the natural environment, how to travel safely and to identify and manage risk. The many visits to places of interest, including visits to London and a residential visit, enrich pupils' school experience.

The school is very mindful of staff well-being and the challenges of working in this specialist setting. It provides staff with extra support, including counselling. Appropriate measures are in place to avoid unnecessary additional burdens on staff.

Governance statutory duties are fulfilled. However, roles and responsibilities between the trust board and local governing body are not clear. Accountability and oversight are not sufficiently robust.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's approach to de-escalating inappropriate behaviour when pupils struggle to regulate their emotions and behaviour is not embedded or fully effective. As a result, there are a high number of occasions when staff need to use physical intervention to ensure the safety of pupils and staff. The school needs to ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills they need to follow the school's approach more consistently so that the need for physical intervention is reduced.
- There are inconsistencies in how well the curriculum is implemented. Teaching does not consistently take into account pupils' previous learning. Additionally, some learning activities are not designed well enough to focus on what pupils need to learn. As a result, they do not achieve well enough. The school needs to take steps to ensure that staff are supported to implement the curriculum in the way that leaders intend.
- The school has not ensured that the curriculum gives sufficient focus to important aspects of pupils' writing, including sentence construction and handwriting. Weaknesses in these aspects of pupils' writing are not addressed well enough. This hampers the quality of pupils' writing and their ability to communicate in writing in English as well as in the wider curriculum. The school needs to review and strengthen its approaches to writing so that there is sufficient focus on important foundational knowledge.
- The trust is not clear about what governance responsibilities and functions are held with the board of trustees and what it has delegated to the local governing body. Responsibilities are unclear, and oversight and accountability are not sufficiently robust. The trust needs to take action to strengthen governance arrangements.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 predecessor school, Littledown School, to be good for overall effectiveness in May 2013.

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	140244
Local authority	Slough
Inspection number	10379875
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	41
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Debbie Richards
CEO of the trust	Angela Mumford
Headteacher	Angela Mumford
Website	www.littledownschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	5 and 6 February 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Specialist Education Trust. It is registered as a multi-academy trust but is currently the only school in this trust.
- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils have other needs, including communication and language difficulties. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism.
- The school runs alternative provision for pupils who have been permanently excluded from other schools. Pupils attend this provision full-time until the local authority allocates a permanent place for them at a school. At the time of the inspection, four pupils were attending this provision.
- All pupils who are registered permanently at the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school provides outreach support to local schools. This is a traded service that schools may purchase. This service is known as the Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Outreach Services.

- At the time of the inspection, the youngest pupils on roll were in Year 1. The majority of pupils on roll are in Years 3 to 6.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The headteacher took up post in September 2020.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This is 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.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. They met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and staff.
- 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.
- The lead inspector met with the chair of the board of trustees. She also held telephone discussions with the local authority designated officer and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents through their responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They considered staff's views during meetings with them and through their responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.
- Inspectors talked with pupils during visits to lessons and at other times of the day, such as breaktime and lunchtime.

Inspection team

Sue Cox, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Paul James

Ofsted Inspector

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