

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

Abbey Road, Pilton, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 1JU

Inspection dates:

15 and 16 October 2024

Outcome

Pathfield School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pathfield School caters for pupils aged 3 to 19 with profound and severe learning difficulties. The school includes a centre for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, known as 'Pathways'. This is a school where pupils settle in quickly, even when they have spent a lot of time out of education. Before long, they are learning happily in their small class groups.

The school provides different curriculum routes for pupils to follow depending on their needs. Pupils in the 'pre-formal' stage learn through sensory experiences. Meanwhile, pupils learning through more formal approaches focus on early reading and mathematics. Many pupils become accurate readers. This is down to the school's can-do attitude and systematic teaching methods.

Over time, pupils grow comfortable in the school environment. Therapeutic sessions, including in music, art and drama, help them to express their emotions and regulate their behaviour. For some, this opens up more formal learning opportunities. Increasingly, pupils gain valuable qualifications in key stages 4 and 5. As far as possible, pupils learn to live independent lives. The school is a powerful advocate for older students' lives beyond school, including those who move into supported living arrangements as young adults.

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

The school has designed an engaging curriculum which is usually well-matched to pupils' needs. Children in the early years and some older pupils, learn to develop their attention and focus. The school provides lots of sensory stimulation. This keeps pupils' interest and prepares them for more formal learning. The school supports pupils to find and use a

communication style that works for them. Staff often get together to develop their own expertise. This helps them to better support pupils using Makaton or Braille, for example.

Reading sits at the heart of all formal learning. The school is highly skilled in recognising when pupils are ready to begin their early reading journey. For some, phonics learning begins in the early years, for others, this comes later. The whole school is organised to support phonics learning. There is a joyful atmosphere as reading lessons get underway across the school. Many pupils exceed previous expectations in reading. Increasingly, pupils in key stage 3 become fluent readers. They understand and can discuss their reading maturely.

The school has identified the most important learning to prepare pupils for independent adult lives. For example, the mathematics curriculum has been adapted so that pupils spend more time learning about time and money. Pupils regularly repeat and revisit this key learning. This helps them to remember and gives them confidence with routines and transactions.

In key stages 4 and 5 there are opportunities for pupils to gain qualifications in literacy and numeracy. The school enables pupils to gain formal credit for their work in areas of interest such as hydrotherapy, horticulture, animal care and food hygiene. Pupils achieve a good depth of knowledge through these personalised courses.

Nonetheless, there are some secondary-aged pupils who could achieve more with subject-specialist teaching. In the 'Pathways' provision, the school has begun to develop its offer in mathematics so that pupils can study for a GCSE where appropriate. However, this is not a well-established approach. Pupils have limited opportunities to study other subjects at the same level, because the school has not developed the teacher subject knowledge to support this. Consequently, some pupils do not learn subjects in enough depth.

The school is expert in meeting pupils' emotional needs. The impact of this is clear in the 'Pathways' provision, where pupils who have found school attendance difficult in the past, are now ready for age-appropriate learning. During important transitions, such as when pupils first join the school and as they reach adolescence, the school's support for pupils and their families is exceptional. This work is underpinned by learning in personal, social and health education, which takes careful account of pupils' needs and the ways in which they are vulnerable.

The school has considerable experience in supporting and managing behavioural needs. Pupils' relationships with key staff are carefully developed. This helps the school to predict and offset any difficult situations. Although many pupils have complex medical needs and disabilities, they attend school very well. The school is developing its approach to promoting better attendance among older pupils with high anxiety.

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, benefit from appropriate advice about careers and their next steps. For example, the school invites a range of education and training providers, alongside providers of supported accommodation, into school to meet with

pupils and their families. The school works closely with local providers to make sure that pupils gain the qualifications they need for a place at college where appropriate.

The school benefits from focused and effective leadership. Since the last inspection, expectations of what pupils can learn have risen considerably. Pupils and staff alike have taken a lot of confidence from the school's highly successful approach to early reading. A well-informed governing body provides valuable support for the school and helps to ensure that high standards are maintained over time.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In the secondary phase, a small proportion of pupils are ready to learn more challenging curriculum content. However, the school has not developed the necessary subject-specific expertise among staff to make this possible. As a result, some pupils do not learn subjects in as much depth or gain the qualifications that they could. The school should ensure that pupils receive the expert subject teaching that they need to fulfil their potential.

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 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in March 2019.

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	113638
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10344488
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	190
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Rosemary Mitchell
Headteacher	Stuart Allman
Website	www.pathfield.devon.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	27 and 28 March 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a specialist provider of education for pupils with profound or severe learning difficulties and pupils on the autistic spectrum.
- The school operates on two sites. The main school site is Pathfield School, Abbey Road, Pilton, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 1JU. Here, the school provides education for 174 pupils with profound and severe learning difficulties, aged 3 to 19. The school has additional premises at Unit 14, Two Rivers Industrial Estate, Braunton Road, Barnstaple EX31 1JY. This site is known as the 'Discovery Centre'. A provision for pupils aged 11 to 16, with social, emotional and mental health needs, known as 'Pathways', is based there.
- Since the last inspection, the headteacher and two deputy headteachers have joined the school.
- Pathfield School is a member of the SENTient Trust. This is a cooperative educational trust of nine special schools in Devon.

- Children in the Reception Year are exempt from the learning and development requirements of the early years foundation stage.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- 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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, the chair of the governing body and two other governors. The lead inspector held telephone discussions with a representative of Devon local authority and a school improvement partner appointed by the school.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- 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

Lydia Pride, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Paula Marsh

Ofsted Inspector

Susan Aykin

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.

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/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: 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
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2024