

Grove House School

Sawyers Hall Lane, Brentwood, Essex CM15 9DA

Inspection dates

6–7 June 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Insufficient evidence
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- High-quality support and challenge from the SEAX Multi Academy Trust (MAT) ensure that leaders and governors are constantly reflecting on and improving their work.
- Governors provide strong support and have high expectations of the school. They bring a good mixture of experience and expertise to provide appropriate challenge.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Typically, pupils make good progress from often low starting points. Disadvantaged pupils do as well and sometimes better than their peers.
- Teachers are highly skilled, motivated and conscientious. They take part in a wide range of training in order to develop their skills and expertise.
- The school provides pupils with high-quality therapeutic provision. This is making a positive contribution to pupils' self-esteem.
- Teachers and learning support assistants create a calm learning environment which enables pupils, as they move through the school, to grow in confidence and maturity.
- Teachers accurately assess what pupils already know and can do when they join the school, then build on this effectively.
- The school is a safe, caring environment.
- The curriculum is skilfully designed to focus on pupils' needs and stages of development. It is further enhanced by the intervention programmes.
- The behaviour of the pupils is outstanding. They have positive attitudes to learning. They show respect to their peers and adults. Disruption in lessons is extremely rare and no learning time is lost.
- At times, teachers provide insufficient challenge for the most able pupils. Consequently, they do not make as much progress as they could.
- Middle leaders are not involved in the school's improvement work sufficiently and this limits their ability to raise standards further in their areas of responsibility.
- Teachers do not always ensure that pupils have the necessary reading and spelling skills to help them to secure outstanding progress across the curriculum.
- Leaders' plans for improvement lack precise arrangements for monitoring actions throughout the school year.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management further by:
 - ensuring that actions in plans are measured rigorously to show pupils' academic progress and personal development
 - ensuring that middle leaders take a greater responsibility for leading improvements in their areas.
- Make teaching, learning and assessment outstanding by:
 - providing more opportunities for the most able pupils to make rapid progress
 - ensuring that pupils' skills in reading and spelling are developed even further, in all subjects and in all years.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher is steadfast in providing the very best education, care and support for her pupils. She provides clear, coherent leadership and has high aspirations for all. Leaders, governors and the multi-academy trust have worked with determination to provide the best for all pupils.
- Staff form a cohesive and enthusiastic team which ensures that pupils make good progress. They are passionate about re-engaging pupils in their learning and helping them to fulfil their potential, both academically and socially.
- The MAT has provided highly valuable support to raise standards. The chief executive principal of the trust provides excellent vision and purpose. She takes her role seriously and works with passion and determination. Trustees challenge leaders thoroughly about pupils' achievement and have a clear strategic vision in order to help the school move forwards. Trustees not only know the school well, but are proactive and successful in helping to secure improvements.
- Self-evaluation at the school is perceptive. Leaders have a precise understanding of what the school does well and what needs to improve further, because of their frequent and focused monitoring activities.
- The headteacher has a clear understanding of the current quality of education provided by the school. Leaders are successful in improving the quality of teaching because teachers are given opportunities to update and improve their skills. They work closely with colleagues across the MAT, sharing good practice and opportunities for further development.
- Leaders regularly check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and tracking progress. They provide support and guidance when required. As a result, the quality of teaching is good and impacts positively on pupils' outcomes.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Leaders prioritise the development of pupils' literacy, mathematics and life skills. The curriculum is carefully designed to meet the needs of the pupils. The three main components are the academic curriculum, the therapeutic curriculum and the social and emotional well-being curriculum. All three are treated with importance.
- The extra-curricular programme is wide-ranging and encourages pupils to develop their speech, language and communication skills. Pupils appreciate and enjoy all the opportunities provided, which develop self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Staff track closely pupils' social and academic development. Leaders provide parents and carers with frequent information letters, opportunities to talk to teachers, the opportunity to attend special assemblies or events throughout the year and termly reports. The home-school book provides daily information about the progress made by pupils. One parent commented, 'The home-school book is brilliant. Communication is incredible.'

- The pupil premium funding is used very effectively to ensure that pupils benefit from activities and areas of the curriculum to which they might not otherwise have access. The progress of pupils supported by this funding is monitored rigorously. The impact is evaluated carefully by the headteacher and the governors. This enables disadvantaged pupils to be successful and to be part of everything the school has to offer.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is used to provide pupils with additional web-based mathematics software. An additional reading scheme also promotes further engagement with reading. The primary school PE and sport premium funding is used creatively to provide key stage 2 pupils with a range of sporting and physical activities. This raises their self-esteem and develops further their interpersonal skills.
- Leaders contribute well to annual reviews of pupils' education, health and care plans (EHCP). They identify appropriate personal targets that are suitably challenging and appropriate for each pupil. Parental engagement is very high and is planned across the year. For example, attendance at parents meetings, annual reviews and EHCP meetings is consistently over 90%.
- Pupil's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is threaded through all of the school's activities and makes a strong contribution to pupils' behaviour and welfare. Pupils discuss current topics in the news and explore their thoughts and ideas through lively debates about the wider world. The school fosters good relations. It endeavours to promote equality of opportunity for all pupils. Discrimination is not tolerated in any form.
- The school prioritises the support it offers on transition when pupils enter the school. Carefully considered arrangements help pupils to settle quickly in order to gain confidence and develop positive relationships with staff and other pupils. The school has a positive ethos. Consequently, the school provides a calm, thoughtful and considerate environment where pupils mix well together.
- The responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff were overwhelmingly positive. Staff have high morale. Every member of staff is proud to work at this school. Staff feel that they are both well supported and well led.
- The contribution that middle leaders make to the school's self-evaluation and subsequent development planning is limited. Strategies have been put in place to develop further the role of the middle leaders and to increase their contribution to the effectiveness of the school and its teaching.
- The school development plan lacks the necessary precision to show how planned actions to improve pupils' progress over time are monitored or measured. However, it is detailed and fully reflects leaders' accurate evaluation of the school's performance.
- The school is proactive in seeking the views of parents. Recent internal questionnaires undertaken by the school show that parents are extremely positive about the quality of care and education their child receives. The small number of parents with whom the inspectors spoke face to face also agree, with very rare exceptions. This is at variance with Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, where the small number of parents who responded were less positive.

Governance

- Governors are passionate about the school and share leaders' ambition for pupils' success. They are extremely committed and take their roles and responsibilities very seriously. They are highly skilled and knowledgeable.
- Meetings are strategically focused, and appropriate checks are made to ensure that their statutory duties are met regarding safeguarding pupils and employment of staff.
- The governors have an excellent understanding of information on pupils' progress. They know about the quality of teaching in the school. They ask challenging questions of the school's leadership to discover whether targets are being met.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Policies and procedures to protect children are up to date and shared with parents on the school's website.
- Safer recruitment procedures are comprehensive. Recruitment is thorough, with references always verified and checks undertaken prior to appointment. The single central record is maintained carefully and meets requirements.
- Leaders place a high priority on pupils' safety and welfare. The vigilance of well-trained staff, who know the signs of abuse and neglect, helps safeguard pupils. Links with outside agencies are well established.
- Pupils are taught well about unsafe situations and how to keep safe. They also receive appropriate guidance about e-safety, cyber bullying and the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Very positive relationships with staff mean that pupils know that they can always get help from a trusted adult if they have a worry or a concern.
- The school site is safe and secure. Entry and exit points are closely supervised by staff. All medicines are stored safely.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have high expectations of pupils. Taking into consideration pupils' starting points when they arrive at the school and their learning needs, pupils make consistently strong progress across the key stages in a range of subjects.
- When pupils arrive at the school, they are quickly assessed by teachers to establish what they know and can do. This assessment is used as a baseline to plan activities that engage and motivate pupils and meet their needs. The progress pupils make accelerates as they become more secure and confident in their learning environment.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are impressive. Staff provide a positive environment for learning. They use their understanding of the pupils' needs to plan well-structured lessons and correct any misconceptions that pupils have, before moving them on in their learning.

- Teachers and speech and language therapists work extremely well together. They set challenging targets for pupils which help them secure next steps in learning and personal development. Consequently, each pupil understands what is expected of them. This was evident in the behaviour and high-quality social skills that inspectors observed during the inspection.
- Occupational therapists provide classroom support in practical subjects where necessary. Movement breaks are implemented to meet the needs of those pupils with fine motor, gross motor and sensory processing difficulties.
- Teachers and learning support assistants work closely together in lessons to support pupils. They ensure that tasks are closely matched to individuals and use ongoing assessments effectively.
- Learning support assistants are highly skilled and well deployed. They develop strong relationships with pupils, expect them to work hard and provide effective support which contributes to pupils' good progress.
- Staff do all they can to promote the development of pupils' communication skills. They use targeted questioning well to probe and develop pupils' understanding. This skilful questioning helps pupils to think carefully about what they are learning. An example of this was seen in a mathematics lesson, where the teacher's questions reinforced pupils' knowledge and understanding of coordinates.
- The well-resourced library provides a warm, welcoming space where pupils can enjoy reading and be a member of the book club.
- Some teaching does not routinely ensure that the most able pupils are challenged to extend their answers or improve the quality of their written responses sufficiently.
- Work in pupils' books and assessment information show that spelling and reading needs further improvement in order to support pupils learning across all of the subject areas.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Excellent pastoral support and, when needed, medical support help pupils to feel exceptionally well cared for in the school. Pupils spoken to say they feel safe. They know who to speak to if they have a concern.
- Pupils wear their uniform with pride throughout all age ranges. They demonstrate a mature respect for the environment, which is very tidy and exceptionally well kept.
- There is an active school council which helps to develop pupils' independence and responsibility. As a result, pupils feel they have a strong voice and can see the changes in the school that they have instigated, for example a new playground area. Pupils say that they like the school and are keen to attend.

- A broad range of enrichment activities make a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Speech and language therapists work alongside teaching staff in the classroom to support pupils' needs. This builds pupils' confidence that they are able to access more challenging work. Pupils have music therapy that supports the development of communication, interaction, self-expression, and listening and responding skills. An occupational therapist is available to support pupils with motor or sensory processing difficulties.
- Learning is enhanced by a strong extra-curricular programme, including trips. Drama, board games, various sports, yoga, the library club, the Duke of Edinburgh award and visits to the theatre offer social time for pupils to develop their communication skills.
- There is appropriate outside space for play and recreation which is well maintained and enjoyed by pupils.
- Many parents make positive comments about the school, including, 'We would be lost without this school as everything they do is amazing. I cannot sing their praises highly enough.' Another parent stated that 'communication is incredible. The home-school book is brilliant. It is always clear as to where my child is at in their learning.'
- Staff know pupils well and have a secure understanding of their needs. They are aware of circumstances that might trigger challenging behaviour and employ effective methods of de-escalation.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Leaders have created an ethos of exceptionally high expectation. Behaviour in the classroom and around the school is excellent. Where challenging behaviour occasionally occurs, it is dealt with calmly and skilfully so that learning resumes quickly.
- Pupils are polite, friendly and respectful. They have exceptionally strong relationships with adults. Their trust in adults and their feelings of safety are evident in their concentration for relatively long periods and their cooperation in learning activities. As a result, disruption in lessons is extremely rare and little learning time is lost.
- Leaders track pupils' behaviour rigorously and systematically. This enables them to spot patterns of concern and act quickly. Leaders use exclusions sparingly and effectively. On the rare occasions that leaders exclude pupils, it is to uphold the high levels of behaviour expected by all.
- Pupils enjoy the healthy options available in the canteen area. Mealtimes are sociable and civilised occasions.
- Staff have a deep understanding of each pupil's needs and preferences. Whenever a pupil becomes unhappy or anxious, adults rigorously examine the causes for the behaviour and immediately adapt strategies to enable the pupil to relax and to enjoy their experiences.

- Bullying is extremely rare at the school. Pupils steadily learn through frequent interaction and communication with adults how to take responsibility for their own conduct. Adults supervise pupils closely while allowing them as much independence as possible. Adults provide excellent role models.
- Pupils typically have a history of poor attendance when they join the school. However, their attendance improves considerably due to the bespoke approach staff take with pupils.
- The school has rigorous systems for checking on attendance, which is meticulously tracked. Leaders take rapid action if it falls below their expectations. Sometimes pupils' attendance is limited due to medical conditions which prevent them from coming to the school as often as they would like. The school works exceptionally hard with families and other agencies to provide relevant, personalised support, when needed.
- The number of school behaviour incidents over the last year has reduced significantly and the school's monitoring reflects that any incidents are followed up and resolved appropriately. The recording of the few serious incidents is detailed. This enables staff to reflect on their practice and to re-engage pupils more effectively.
- Fixed-term exclusion rates are very low and are only used to maintain the highest standards of behaviour. There have been no permanent exclusions.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- All pupils have an EHCP or a statement of special educational needs. Many pupils arrive with a history of disrupted education and high levels of anxiety. Staff assess pupils on entry to establish what they know, what they can do and how they feel about their learning.
- Pupils' rates of progress have to be considered in the context of their individual needs. Inspection evidence shows that the vast majority of pupils make good progress against the targets set, based on information from the school's own baseline assessments and the targets set from their EHCP.
- Inspectors looked in detail at pupils' learning through a number of cases studies. Pupils make strong progress from their starting points, including in developing their communication skills.
- The work in books shows that pupils' progress is strong across the range of curriculum subjects, social development and the therapeutic targets set across the different key stages.
- The development of literacy, communication and numeracy is embedded in all areas of the curriculum. Pupils make good progress from their starting points. The vast majority of pupils treat their exercise books with pride.
- Leaders use the extra funding provided by the pupil premium effectively. Disadvantaged pupils make good progress in their learning. There is no gap between the progress of these pupils and others.

- Pupils learn how to write their curriculum vitae and how to apply for a job. They are taught how to present themselves at interview. They learn about the different work roles and career pathways available, including clarifying their own early career aspirations.
- Pupils are offered a wide range of age-appropriate opportunities to develop their reading in different contexts. However, the quality of pupils' spelling and their reading needs further development.
- Pupils are able to follow a number of accredited courses at key stage 4. These include entry level, functional skills, BTEC, ECDL and GCSEs in subjects including English, mathematics and art.
- No school performance information for key stage 4 yet exists, as the first pupils will enter Year 11 in September 2018.
- Greater consistency is needed in stretching and challenging the most able pupils to ensure that they achieve their full potential.

16 to 19 study programmes

Insufficient evidence

- The school is registered to accept pupils up to 19 years of age. There are presently no students in the sixth form. The school plans to open the provision in September 2019.
- Accommodation is available for the sixth form, when the school expands.
- The school is in the process of deciding which courses will be made available to the sixth-form students.

School details

Unique reference number	141945
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10046600

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	79
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	0
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Sally Lockyer
Headteacher	Miss Lisa Christodoulides
Telephone number	01277 361498
Website	http://grovehouseschool.co.uk/
Email address	info@grovehouseschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Grove House School is a special school. All pupils have an EHCP or a statement of special educational needs. Their primary difficulties are speech, language and communication.
- The vast majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average.
- In July 2015, the Department for Education commissioned Ofsted to conduct a pre-registration inspection. All of the school standards that were checked at that time were deemed likely to be met.

- This is the first inspection for the school since it opened in September 2015. The school does not have any students in the sixth form. This development is at too early a stage to make a separate judgement on the quality of the sixth-form provision.
- Grove House School opened as a single academy trust in September 2015 as a free school. It is currently in its third year of growth.
- The school is registered for pupils aged 8 to 19 years. At capacity it will admit 105 pupils.
- In October 2016, the school became a partner academy in the SEAX multi-academy trust and currently has four special academy partners.
- The SEAX Trust is a multi-academy trust in Essex, established by the special school sector in April 2015.
- The SEAX board of trustees is accountable for the strategic direction of the trust. The trust committees are resources and audit, and curriculum and standards. These are given delegated authority to make decisions, monitor, evaluate and review particular plan, policies and targets.
- The local academy committee has been given delegated authorities to make decisions, monitor, evaluate and review plans, policies and targets in relation to Grove House School. Each academy has representation on the board of trustees.
- The school has undergone considerable construction work and refurbishment to its premises, and this has been ongoing during the first two-and-a-half years of operation. The site consists of a two-storey main building, which includes specialist therapy rooms, a small separate block and a section dedicated to primary pupils.
- The school makes no use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons across all of the key stages, many jointly with senior leaders.
- Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, other staff, members of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the trust.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons and a sample of pupils' books.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons, before school, at breaktime and at lunchtime. Inspectors also observed pupils' learning and behaviour in assemblies and tutor time.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils, from all year groups, in discussions and informally around the school.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in extra-curricular activities.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, its improvement plans, minutes of meetings of the governing body, information about the attainment and progress of all pupils, records relating to behaviour and safeguarding, and information on the school's website.
- Inspectors considered the 43 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and free-text responses from parents and carers. They also considered the results of the school's own surveys completed by parents.
- Inspectors considered the 29 responses to the Ofsted staff questionnaire.
- The lead inspector held one telephone conversation with a parent and took into consideration two email responses.

Inspection team

Stefanie Lipinski-Barltrop, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Teresa Skeggs

Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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