

The Lindfield School

Lindfield Road, Hampden Park, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN22 0BQ

Inspection dates

11–12 December 2015

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The executive headteacher and head of school are highly effective. They have successfully established a culture of trust and openness and an unwavering focus on pupils' academic and social development. Consequently, teachers take calculated risks to deliver lessons in which pupils learn exceptionally well.
- Leaders use particularly well-developed systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning. These are innovative and robust. Leaders use them exceptionally well to judge where there are strengths and areas for development. As a result, leaders' plans are precisely targeted and bring about continuous improvement.
- Governors provide very strong strategic direction in their work. They set very high expectations about what they want to achieve for the pupils that they serve. They have made very good use of the opportunities offered by the federation to build wider capacity in leadership.
- The curriculum is skilfully designed with pupils' career pathways in mind. Work experience and careers advice dovetail seamlessly with lessons and other learning opportunities. Pupils are extremely well prepared for the next stage in their education or training.
- The school's core values of respect, honesty, trust and kindness permeate through the actions of staff and pupils. Respectful two-way relationships are fostered by staff and are highly valued by pupils and their parents. Pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The quality of teaching is consistently of the highest standard. Teachers' highly rigorous use of assessment means that lessons help pupils make rapid and sustained progress.
- Leaders utilise collaborative opportunities exceptionally well to ensure that provision for pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare is tailored to the needs of individuals and their families.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy their lessons and love to go to school. This is reflected in very high attendance and their excellent attitudes to learning.
- Safeguarding arrangements are very effective. Pupils feel and are safe in school. Leaders' detailed knowledge of individuals ensures that they are very well looked after.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Embed the new assessment systems introduced by leaders, so that they fully link into the learning pathways for pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The executive headteacher has continued to secure rapid improvement to provision. His exceptional leadership is very well supported by the ambition and drive of the head of school. Together they have secured an unwavering focus among staff on pupils' academic and social development. Consequently, staff work tirelessly together to provide an education that is carefully tailored to each pupil's individual needs.
- Leaders have developed innovative and highly effective ways to check the quality of learning in lessons and over time. These include assessing pupils' achievements against a range of diverse measures. As a result, leaders at all levels and all teaching staff analyse deeply the progress pupils are making against short- and long-term targets. They identify very quickly if pupils are not making the progress that they want. Provision is highly responsive to the analysis staff have undertaken. This ensures that pupils make exceptional progress from their starting points.
- Performance management is rigorously linked to the checks made on learning. Targets are set which are highly ambitious and measurable. They are reviewed regularly to ensure that teachers are continually challenged to get the best outcomes possible for the pupils they are responsible for. Poor performance is not tolerated. There are well-developed and effective systems for supporting teachers if they are not making the expected difference to pupils' progress. The leadership of teaching is robust. Consequently, teaching has continued to improve and is exceptionally effective.
- Leaders have made very good use of the opportunities offered by the federation to develop a highly effective leadership structure. For example, the pupil support manager focuses on ensuring safeguarding arrangements are robust across the federation. Middle leadership roles, such as the leads for Key Stages 3, 4 and 5, ensure that responsibilities are strategically shared out to very good effect. For example, the Key Stage 5 leader has responsibility for tracking and supporting pupils when they leave the school and move on to their next stage of education, employment or training.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and rightly focused on the potential career pathways for pupils, as well as being tailored to their specific needs. Lessons are sharply focused on academic and social targets which, appropriately, have pupils' long-term economic and personal well-being as their priority. Pupils' individual needs are regularly assessed to ensure that the courses they are doing are suitably challenging and support them in developing the workplace skills they will need to succeed. Career pathways are promoted with these skills and the aims of the parents and pupils in mind. This means that pupils are always thoroughly prepared for the next stage in their education, employment or training.
- The curriculum is very successfully built around the school's core values of respect, honesty, trust and kindness. Pupils are seen as individuals and their specific needs are catered for extremely well. Consequently, there is equality of opportunity for all. Pupils learn to value and celebrate each other's differences. They take pride in their community and look to make a contribution. As well as from an active school council, pupils learn about fundamental British values through visits to the Houses of Parliament, as an example. They are very aware of democratic processes because pupils get the opportunity to contribute in a range of ways. For example, one pupil has been successfully elected onto the East Sussex Youth Parliament. Pupils are aware that she will be able to give them a voice when decisions are being made on their behalf.
- Leaders have made exceptionally good use of the pupil premium grant. For example, the appointment of a speech and language support assistant across the federation has been used to very good effect to support disadvantaged pupils. The grant is used creatively to ensure that pupils can attend well and that their emotional needs are met. These ventures are delivered in a bespoke way and are very well matched to individual pupils' specific circumstances. This ensures that disadvantaged pupils do at least as well as other pupils in the school and often better.
- The local authority has had a marked impact on the provision of the school. It brokered the initial formation of the federation by securing the services of the executive headteacher, and continues to provide appropriate support and challenge to this highly effective school. It rightly recognises the strengths in leadership and management, and provides useful external verification for governors.

■ The governance of the school

- Governors are a highly effective body. They provide an extremely ambitious strategic steer for the school, as demonstrated in their drive to make the federation a success. They look to ensure that the decisions they make are in the best interest of the pupils. For example, the decision to convert to an academy was taken because of the opportunities this would give leaders to provide wider support to pupils and their families, such as respite care. Governors know the school extremely well because they receive detailed information from senior leaders on a regular basis and regularly visit the school to see for themselves. Governors are keen to leave no stone unturned when evaluating the effectiveness of the school. They regularly commission external consultants to undertake specific work so that governors can satisfy themselves that pupils are getting the exceptional provision that governors expect.
- Governors are scrupulous and thorough in their use of money at the school. This includes how the pupil premium grant is allocated. The information they receive from leaders means they can ensure that the money is making the difference that is needed to narrow the gap for disadvantaged pupils. They also robustly challenge leaders in their use of resources, and how these are applied in performance management at the school.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are very effective. Governors and leaders have made exceptionally good use of opportunities offered by the federation to secure robust systems for managing pupils' safety and welfare. Staff receive the appropriate training and this is acted on by all staff who are highly committed to protecting the pupils in their care.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- The quality of teaching is outstanding because teachers make excellent use of assessment to identify the individual needs of every pupil. Consequently, lessons effectively meet pupils' academic and social needs. The professional relationships between teachers and teaching assistants are exceptional in meeting these needs.
- Teachers have extremely high expectations and this is reflected in the great care that goes into planning. Teachers are highly evaluative of their teaching and the impact it is having on pupils' progress towards their academic and social targets. They adapt lessons to meet the individual needs of pupils and ensure that all benefit from tailored feedback. Consequently, lessons provide equal opportunity for all pupils to succeed.
- Teachers often plan lessons that are creative and include elements of risk in an attempt to capture the imagination and enthusiasm of pupils. This is because teachers benefit from the culture of trust that has been established by leaders. As a result, lessons are exciting and engaging for pupils. This was demonstrated very well in an English lesson where Key Stage 3 pupils were learning about characterisation. The teacher made excellent use of technology and other resources to allow pupils to create 3D models of scenes from *A Christmas Carol* to explore how characters responded to different moments within the story.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are deployed very effectively. This ensures that the most is made of specific skills and interests. Teaching assistants are often highly skilled and support learning very effectively.
- The teaching of reading has been developed very effectively by leaders. They have rightly introduced tailored phonics (the link between letters and sounds) which is very effectively helping pupils with their technical reading skills. There are also regular opportunities for pupils to read across the curriculum. Consequently, pupils are learning to love reading.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Leaders have made excellent use of the opportunities offered by the federation to strengthen how they support pupils' personal development and welfare. The pupil support manager knows the pupils' families extremely well. He has developed highly evaluative systems for reviewing attendance and keeps a careful eye on 'the bigger picture' for families to ensure that they are appropriately supported. There is a shared drive among all who work at the school to ensure that pupils feel and are valued.
- Safeguarding arrangements are extremely effective. The pupil support manager is rigorous in the implementation of policies and procedures agreed by governors across the federation. This ensures that there are seamless transitions for vulnerable pupils as they move up to The Lindfield from the South Downs Special School. Pupils settle into their new school very quickly because they are quickly made to feel safe, secure and valued.
- Staff are highly vigilant, know and care for pupils extremely well, and are scrupulous about following up any concerns they have.
- Elements of the curriculum promote pupils' well-being extremely well. For example, the physical education department promotes interest in and the enjoyment of exercise exceptionally well. Pupils learn the importance of living healthily because they understand the benefits of being active. Pupils also develop a range of strategies that help them to assess risk more effectively. Leaders ensure that they are given opportunities to learn how to cross the road safely and how to use public transport in a safe way. They are well aware of the risks that they face when using the internet.
- Work experience and careers advice are very well planned and meet the specific needs of pupils at the school. This is because leaders ensure that pupils are clear about their strengths as learners, and help them to set realistic goals for their next steps when leaving the school. The ambitious advice, along with the tailored experiences secured for pupils, are linked to the qualifications offered to each individual. This prepares pupils exceptionally well for the next stage in their education. Consequently, the vast majority of pupils leave the school to go on to successful education, employment or training.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils exhibit excellent attitudes to their learning. They are valued members of the school community and make a significant contribution to the family atmosphere at the school. They share in the achievements of their peers, as was very well demonstrated in an achievement assembly. One pupil was awarded a football shirt that had been purchased by her tutor group in recognition of her bravery. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility. For example, Year 11 pupils can be prefects and there is a 'Head Girl' and 'Head Boy' who are democratically elected.
- The school is an incredibly rewarding and exciting place for pupils to learn. Pupils value the excellent relationships they have with their tutors and teachers. They love coming to school and so attendance is well above that of similar schools.
- Behaviour is managed extremely effectively. Leaders have implemented very well-designed policies for staff to follow, which pupils find to be fair. Pupils are clear about what is expected of them. There are also well thought out programmes to support those who find managing their own behaviour more challenging. This ensures that behaviour is improved effectively over time.
- As a result of the improvements in behaviour and self-awareness, pupils learn to trust the staff who work with them. This ensures that, when they are actively taught to communicate with each other in lessons, they feel secure coming out of their comfort zone.

Outcomes for pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' outcomes are central to the vision, ambition and management of leaders. All staff are relentlessly focused on pupils' academic and social development, and have very high expectations of what they want pupils to achieve. Pupils are highly committed to their learning because teachers ensure that lessons are engaging and fun. Consequently, they make substantial and sustained progress in lessons and over time.

- Due to their level of need, pupils often join the school with attainment that is much lower than is typical. Nevertheless, assessment information shows clearly that from their starting points the proportion of pupils who make better than expected progress is far higher than that found nationally. Evidence also shows that there is no difference in the achievement of different groups because provision is tailored to individual need.
- The attainment of pupils has significantly improved over the last four years. This is because of the highly effective systems for checking pupils' progress, and their use in planning and delivering learning opportunities for pupils. This is reflected in the fact that no pupil leaves the school without at least one qualification and often with many, despite their profound needs.
- Disadvantaged pupils make the same outstanding progress as their peers. They are equally well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training. They make remarkable gains in their literacy, numeracy and social skills from their starting points and so the gap in their attainment compared with their peers is closing rapidly.
- Reading is very well promoted throughout the school. There are also extremely well-developed strategies for ensuring that pupils are able to apply their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

School details

Unique reference number	114693
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10005621

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	86
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Neal
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Remo Palladino
Telephone number	01323 502988
Website	www.southdowns-lindfield.com/lindfield
Email address	mailto:office@lindfield.e-sussex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	September 2011

Information about this school

- The Lindfield School is a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum conditions and social, communication and associated learning difficulties.
- All pupils are supported by a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and a much smaller proportion speak English as an additional language. There are approximately twice as many boys as girls.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional government funding for pupils who qualify for free school meals or are in the care of the local authority) is well above average.
- Since the time of the last inspection, the collaborative arrangements between The Lindfield School and the South Downs Special School have been formalised. This means that there is now a single governing body and an executive headteacher that provide leadership for both schools.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 10 lessons across all departments, all jointly with a member of the senior leadership team. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school, in an assembly and during lessons. They analysed records of pupils' achievement, talked with a group of pupils and talked to some pupils about their work in lessons.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, the heads of key stages, learning leads for literacy and numeracy, and a group of governors, including the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors also spoke to a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors looked closely at documentation, including minutes of governing body meetings, the leaders' analysis of how well the school is doing, leaders' improvement plans and assessment information about pupils' achievement. Inspectors also reviewed the school's behaviour logs.
- Inspectors took account of 11 responses from parents to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke to three parents on the telephone.

Inspection team

Matthew Barnes, lead inspector
Jennifer Boyd

Her Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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