

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Bower Grove School

Fant Lane, Maidstone, Kent ME16 8NL

Inspection dates:

19 and 20 November 2024

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where pupils' self-esteem and well-being is prioritised. The school's strong support for pupils' emotional and social development helps to build their resilience and confidence. As a result, pupils say that they feel protected and enjoy coming to school.

Staff build positive working relationships with pupils. Staff get to know pupils exceptionally well, understanding their behavioural and emotional needs. Pupils are helped to identify what may cause them to experience challenges. They are taught strategies to help them to understand and manage their emotions and how to respond to different situations. Pupils trust staff to help resolve any issues or concerns that may arise. Consequently, for many pupils, incidents of behaviour in and outside of the classroom reduce over time.

All staff have high aspirations for pupils. They encourage pupils to be ambitious for themselves. Pupils are provided with a range of opportunities and experiences to prepare them for adulthood. The school offers comprehensive travel training and an extensive array of work experience placements based on pupils' interests. Pupils might spend time with the army, local primary schools or learn web design. As a result, pupils are ready to take their next steps when they leave the school.

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

The school is aspirational for pupils' achievement and has curriculum pathways that are ambitious. It carefully balances pupils' academic learning with crucial emotional, personal

and social development. The school takes effective action to regularly review and strengthen the curriculum and ensure the school maintains its high standards.

Subject curriculums are well ordered and designed to help pupils to know and do more over time. In lessons, pupils mostly practise and recall what they have learned before. Teachers deliver subject content in a logical sequence. This helps pupils to become more confident in learning new knowledge and skills because they have a strong foundation. However, on a few occasions, adaptations to pupils' work or resources to support learning are not sharply tailored to the individual needs of pupils. This means that sometimes pupils do not have the right support needed to practice, strengthen and develop knowledge and skills.

The school prioritises the teaching of early reading. There is a sharp focus on supporting early readers to become fluent and comprehensive readers. Pupils read books that are closely matched to the sounds they know. Pupils' phonics knowledge is checked regularly by the school. Pupils identified as falling behind receive help to close gaps through well-adapted phonics lessons and personalised interventions.

Pupils study a range of qualifications and accreditations. The school continues to revise this provision. The school works with local colleges to enhance the broad curriculum offer with a range of vocational experiences. This includes bricklaying, motor mechanics and public service. The school supports pupils to leave with the qualifications they need to continue their education or for employment.

The school provides a number of opportunities for pupils to experience learning beyond the classroom. Pupils go on overnight stays, including to the Isle of Wight and France. They take part in sporting competitions and can become members of the school council. These opportunities further develop pupils' character and social skills.

The school has designed a rigorous staff and governing body training schedule. This is delivered by the school and multi-agency professionals. This training provides all staff with the knowledge and expertise needed to support pupils' behaviour and well-being needs. As a result, learning in classrooms happens with minimal interruption. Pupils who need time to moderate or regulate do so quickly and return to class ready to re-engage.

Many pupils have missed significant amounts of schooling prior to joining the school. The school understands the challenges that may affect pupils attending school regularly. They work with pupils, parents and carers and other professionals to identify solutions to increase attendance. This includes intensive work with families, mentoring support and social activities. As a result, for many pupils, attendance rates do improve 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)

- On a few occasions, adaptations to the academic work set to pupils' and the resources to support learning lack precision. This means that some pupils do not have the right support to practice, strengthen and develop new knowledge and skills. The school should ensure that teaching is adapted successfully so that all pupils are well supported in their learning.

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 outstanding 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 outstanding for overall effectiveness in September 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	119036
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10341532
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	4 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	241
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Mark Kirby
Headteacher	Maz Cleave
Website	www.bower-grove.kent.sch.uk
Date(s) of previous inspection	18 and 19 September 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with special educational needs. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school has a satellite class at West Borough Primary School. This is a provision for up to 12 pupils, from Year 3 to Year 6.

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 any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders 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.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, teachers and the wider school team.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the governing body and other members of the governing body.
- Inspectors met with representatives from the local authority.
- They also considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for parents, Ofsted Parent View and the online staff survey. They spoke with pupils to gain their views on the school.

Inspection team

Kieran Bird, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Caroline Clarke

Ofsted Inspector

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