

The Pioneer School

Ghyllgrove, Basildon, SS14 2LA

Inspection dates 19–20 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils make good progress and learn important skills for their future lives, especially in speaking and listening skills and numeracy.
- Pupils who have the most profound and multiple learning difficulties make outstanding progress because of the quality of joint work between school staff, including key workers, and specialist therapists.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in their social and personal development.
- Teachers meet the wide range of needs in their class well. They are supported very effectively by teaching assistants.
- The post-16 provision is good. The well-taught programmes prepare students effectively for when they transfer to the next stage of their education or training.
- Pupils are keen to learn and are well-mannered; misbehaviour is uncommon.
- Pupils feel safe and their parents agree that this is so. They know who to speak with if they are worried or upset.
- School accommodation and resources are of exceptional quality and support the curriculum very effectively.
- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the strengths of the school and know where things could be even better.
- Middle leaders are working well to improve the consistency of important planning procedures.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement is not at least good in all lessons because teachers' planning does not always focus sufficiently on the most important next steps in learning and on deploying teaching assistants accordingly.
- School leaders and managers, the governing body and academy trust do not monitor rigorously enough the effectiveness of actions taken to improve pupils' progress.
- A very small number of safeguarding checks have yet to be completed.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited all classes during the inspection. Most of these visits were carried out jointly with a member of the school’s senior leadership team.
- Pupils’ behaviour was observed in lessons, as well as before school started, and at break and lunch times and when pupils were moving around the school.
- Discussions were held with pupils from the school council and at other times during the inspection when opportunities arose. Meetings were also held with members of staff, and representatives of the governing body and the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET).
- The inspectors looked at a range of documents including information on pupils’ progress, attainment and target setting data, the school’s self-evaluation and improvement plan, the monitoring of the quality of teaching, and information on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- The inspectors took into account the views expressed by 48 parents in the survey carried out by the school. There were 13 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) to provide a summary of their views. Inspectors also spoke with three parents and carers during the fund raising morning that took place on the first day of the inspection.

Inspection team

Charlie Henry, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Mary Rayner

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Pioneer School converted to an academy with its own governing body in June 2012. Prior to this time it was also known by the same name. It is one of the chain of academies within the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET). The predecessor provision was last inspected by Ofsted in July 2011 and was judged to be good.
- The academy provides education for pupils with a wide range of special educational needs, including those with moderate, severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. A significant number of pupils have autistic spectrum difficulties. All pupils have statements of special educational need.
- A well above average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals; a small number are looked after by the local authority. The academy receives pupil premium funding (additional funding for those at risk of underachievement) for these pupils. More than two thirds of pupils are boys. The proportion of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds is approximately average nationally; a low proportion speak English as an additional language.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' progress and attainment by ensuring more teaching is outstanding by:
 - ensuring all target setting and planning focuses on the most important next steps in pupils' learning
 - making sure that all adults in lessons contribute as effectively as possible towards pupils' achieving their learning targets.
- Ensure that school improvement plans focus on the most important areas of pupils' learning by:
 - improving the link between self-evaluation and improvement planning
 - using this plan to monitor regularly and evaluate rigorously how effectively the identified dips in learning are being tackled.
- Ensure all required safeguarding checks are carried out.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils make good progress. Most gain important skills and knowledge in key areas of their learning at rates expected for pupils of similar age and starting points, including in developing their speaking and listening skills and in numeracy. Many exceed this level of progress. Where there are dips in pupils' progress in individual lessons these are due to weaknesses in the effectiveness in planning for the needs within the class group.
- Pupils who have the most profound and multiple learning difficulties make outstanding progress as a result of the excellence of their care and support by their teachers, teaching assistants and specialist therapists.
- The youngest children at the Early Years Foundation Stage make good progress across all aspects of their development.
- Post-16 students, including those who start the school at this age, also do well and make good progress, particularly in their preparation for going to college and other post-school settings. During the inspection many of these pupils contributed excellently to a fundraising morning to raise money for a local children's hospice and to the regular lunchtime café for staff and visitors. They showed considerable concentration and maturity as they greeted and served visitors and staff. On leaving school these older students progress to college and adult provision as expected for their age and special educational needs.
- Social and personal development is outstanding and is the result of the very considerable care and respect they are afforded by all staff. They give warm smiles as they greet their staff in the morning and are keen to talk to them at every opportunity. Pupils were enthusiastic to tell inspectors about their work.
- Most older pupils take part in work experience activities either within school or within the community. They gain confidence and maturity through these opportunities.
- Pupils have a good equality of opportunity to do well and are supported effectively to achieve good learning outcomes. All are equally likely to achieve well. There are no significant differences in the progress made by pupils from other ethnic backgrounds, boys and girls, those who have different disabilities and special educational needs and those who are supported by the pupil premium. The school uses this additional funding effectively.
- Similarly the academy has given good consideration to the use of additional sport funding for pupils of primary school age to extend their activities, resources and staff expertise. It is however too early to evaluate the effectiveness of these actions.
- Inspectors agree with the view of the majority of parents who responded to the academy's most recent survey and those who completed Parent View that their children were making good progress.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good and occasionally outstanding. It meets the needs of pupils effectively. Teachers ensure that each member of the staff team knows and understands the key learning targets for each pupil and ensures that they will take part in activities that are well

matched to these goals.

- Relationships between pupils and with staff are outstanding and demonstrate the high level of trust and confidence that pupils have in their teachers and teaching assistants. One pupil explained to the inspectors that the staff understand her needs very well, summing up her complements as, 'They think about me.'
- Teachers' planning is usually very good and shows good understanding of pupils' skills and learning difficulties together with the important next steps in their progress. The staff team use this understanding very well to decide if a pupil is ready to move on or needs further work to consolidate what they are currently learning. However, in weaker lessons there is not enough focus on exactly what are the most important next steps in learning and therefore teaching loses its focus.
- In most lessons teaching assistants are very effective and support learning very well. Where their effectiveness dips then it is due to weaknesses in their teachers' deployment and expectations.
- Behaviour management is excellent. Staff are confident and effective in how they can take a very positive approach to getting the best from their pupils. As a result pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and they grow in confidence.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour is good. This is a well ordered school where pupils want to learn. They are courteous and polite to one another and to staff. These qualities were shown so effectively as when members of the school council spoke with inspectors and explained why they liked school so much.
- When there are slips in the quality of teaching then pupils' attention to their learning also dips.
- Misbehaviour is uncommon and the school's records show that these are dealt with positively and successfully. Behaviour support plans for pupils with identified behavioural difficulties are very good. They explain in straightforward terms how a pupil can be most effectively encouraged to behave appropriately and learn well. Staff use these plans consistently and, as a result, pupils improve.
- Pupils feel safe. They explained that bullying is rare and if it does occur then they are able to tell their teachers and teaching assistants and know it will be dealt with effectively. Parents agree that their children are safe at school.
- Pupils are proud of their school and take care of the premises and learning resources.
- While attendance is lower than the national average this is accounted for by the occasions when pupils are absent due to their medical needs.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. All staff work together very well indeed. Of special note are the contributions of key workers and specialist therapists, and the joined-up planning meetings that promote an effective way of supporting the pupils and their families.

- Risk assessments are thorough and take account of the needs of the individual pupils.

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the strengths of the school and the areas where further improvements could be made. They have used this knowledge well to bring about effective changes.
- Progress data is used effectively to identify whether individual pupils are making the gains that are expected for their age and starting point. This analysis has successfully led to changes in support and consequent improvements in these pupils' progress. The accuracy of the school's data is assured through both moderation of assessment within school and with another special school. The rigour of this process is being increased by liaison with other local schools.
- Performance management is good. These reviews focus on pupils' progress, as do the targets that are subsequently set. Leaders and managers monitor the quality of teaching effectively and are successfully supporting improvements where these are required.
- Middle leaders are contributing well to improving the consistency of the school's policies, for example regarding target setting and planning for lessons. They are aware that these efforts need to continue and are tackling these with the support of senior leaders.
- The school's good understanding of its effectiveness and consequent actions are not expressed as well as they could be in its self-evaluation report and improvement plan. This restricts how confident the leaders and managers can be that they have kept focused on the most important aspects; and also how effectively the governors and the academy trust can monitor improvements.
- The headteacher provides excellent support for other schools in the area regarding special educational needs and is highly praised by the local authority for his contribution.
- The curriculum matches effectively the wide range of pupils' needs and provides a broad range of learning opportunities. The accommodation and resources within the schools are of exceptional quality and supports the curriculum very well.
- The school supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well, for example through a wide range of visitors and the charity events in which the pupils and staff contribute to regularly.
- All staff undertake regular training on child protection, starting from their induction into the school and know the procedures to follow if they have concerns.
- A recent, detailed survey of parents' views by the school has provided very positive feedback and is in line with inspectors' findings. A less positive response about the quality of the school given by a small number of parents to Parent View have not been supported by this inspection.
- The academy trust supports the school effectively in providing training. It also challenges the school to improve where such areas are identified, through regular visits and reviews. However, this process is not as effective as it could be due to the weaknesses identified by inspectors in the school's self-evaluation and improvements documents. Furthermore although the academy trust has recently brought the requirement for them to have undertaken Disclosure and Barring

Service checks to the governors' attention this should have been highlighted earlier.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors contribute well to the developing vision of the school. They are very supportive and records of their meetings show how they ask questions both to deepen their own understanding and challenge the school to check that it is doing well. These meeting minutes do not however show the full extent of their involvement, for example in the regular discussions by a named governor with senior leaders about pupil progress data, and feedback from when they visit during the school day. They take their own improvement as a governing body seriously and have carried out a self-review. They are implementing the review's findings, for example in increasing their knowledge of attainment and progress information. Safeguarding requirements are not fully met. The governors have become aware that it is requirement that they must have received clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service. This is not the current position and a very small number of the group are now undergoing these checks.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138219
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	440150

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	140
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Pamela Stanley
Headteacher	Steve Horsted
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01268 522077
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