

Sunfield School

Clent Grove, Clent, Stourbridge DY9 9PB

Inspection dates 9–11 December 2015

Overall effectiveness **Good**

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils of all ages and abilities make good progress from their various starting points because of good teaching, learning and personal care.
- Senior leaders check carefully on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and on every pupil's progress. Staff are quick to adapt pupils' programmes if their progress appears to slow.
- Staff are skilled at promoting the learning of pupils with autistic spectrum conditions. They build very positive relationships with pupils that inspire them to listen and learn.
- Pupils make good progress in learning to manage their own behaviour and in their attitudes to learning. This means that they are well set up for the next steps in their education or training when they leave Sunfield.
- Sixth form learners make good progress. Teachers plan tasks at just the right level for each learner. A good balance of school and community experiences means that learners practise their social, communication, literacy and numeracy skills in meaningful ways that accelerate progress.
- The curriculum is highly relevant to pupils' needs and really motivates them. Leaders track carefully that it covers all that it should, but also that it is closely linked to pupils' interests and next steps. This ensures that each pupil makes good academic and personal progress.
- Therapists, clinical psychologists and teaching staff work extremely well with parents and placing authorities to form a 'team around the child'. This promotes each pupil's safety, emotional well-being and communication skills extremely well.
- Pupils are kept very safe because of the careful attention to all aspects of safeguarding, including ensuring that all requirements are met.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Themed days, assemblies, charity work and community visits help pupils to develop a good understanding of British values and how others live.
- Trustees are very knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaknesses and about pupils' needs. They ensure that good teaching is rewarded and that staff are held to account for pupils' progress.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally, when pupils are learning well and have finished their work, teachers do not challenge them to achieve even more.
- The ways in which the school tracks and analyses progress, and the courses available for higher attainers, are still being developed in some subjects.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 as amended 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to develop the ways in which the school's leaders check on pupils' understanding and skills, and their progress in subjects, particularly for most-able pupils, so that:
 - activities and work planned by staff always take account of these subject understandings and next steps as well as pupils' broader personal and learning targets
 - the range of qualifications available is adapted to include new qualifications and courses needed to enable each to achieve at the highest level, especially most-able pupils.
- Ensure that staff capitalise on opportunities when pupils are attending and cooperating well, to extend pupils' learning further by always making best use of the time available for learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management **is good**

- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are consistently met. They check carefully that the legal requirements for pupils' statements and education, health and care plans are complied with, often going beyond this. For example, they provide additional or different therapy support if they feel this might accelerate pupils' progress or promote their emotional well-being. They ensure that the pupil premium is spent in ways that improve the achievements of disadvantaged pupils and that they receive the support they need. This means that these pupils achieve at least as well as others in the school.
- The Principal and acting headteacher check carefully on how well pupils are doing and how effectively teaching promotes learning. New systems are in place to track pupils' progress in English, mathematics, science, computing, and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, as well as their progress in social and emotional aspects of learning. These systems are used effectively to set next steps targets and to identify any pupils whose progress might be slowing, as well as those who are achieving well.
- Senior leaders ensure that teaching and learning are good. Regular observation in classrooms and checks on teachers' planning and pupils' work mean they have a very good understanding of the strengths of teaching and where it needs to improve. Robust management of the performance of staff, and good attention to staff training, are further improving teaching.
- The school's leadership team has been strengthened by the creation of middle management posts. Leaders have identified that a small number of pupils could achieve higher qualifications than those usually taken in the school if they continue to make such strong progress. GCSE Level 1 short courses have been introduced and the new coordinator for higher attainers is seeking out a range of other opportunities to challenge them further. An additional post, for developing the pupils' emotional well-being and staff understanding of this, keeps such issues high up in all teachers' minds and in their planning.
- Staff teams work extremely well together to help pupils to become less anxious, and more flexible and ready for learning. Risk assessments are carefully drawn up to ensure that everyone has anticipated where a pupil might struggle, and how to manage this safely. Pupils' personal development is therefore a strength.
- The curriculum has been strengthened considerably since the last inspection. It is highly relevant to pupils' needs, but also now covers all the required areas of learning. A four-year cycle of themes has captured pupils' interest and caters well for their wide-ranging ages, needs and interests. English and mathematics are taught both discretely and across the curriculum. Pupils have many opportunities to apply these skills, gaining confidence in their use and improving them further so that progress in their core skills is consistently good.
- The range of qualifications and courses that pupils can take in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form has also improved. This includes level 1 GCSE short courses that are challenging higher-attaining pupils in the school well. Careers education and support for learners' transition out of the school at 19 is effective and is planned for in detail. The school works well with parents and placing authorities to ensure that pupils have all the advice they should have, including access to independent impartial advice.
- Safeguarding procedures meet all statutory requirements. All staff training policies and procedures are updated at the required intervals. All the required checks on staff suitability are in place and meticulously recorded. Staff have a good understanding of pupils' vulnerabilities. Recent training regarding extremism and e-safety has resulted in an audit of pupils who might be at risk, as well as mapping out how pupils are to be helped to understand such issues. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this initiative.
- Parents are highly positive about the school's work and how it keeps their children safe. They describe it as 'fantastic', saying that their child's progress has 'exceeded our wildest dreams'. The school works closely with parents and placing authorities to ensure that pupils' well-being and safety are supported effectively.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Trustees have a good understanding of the work of the school. They bring a wide range of relevant skills and knowledge to the school. This ensures that they hold leaders to account well and have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.

- Trustees have ensured that the independent school standards are consistently met and that the premises are safe and well cared for. Trustees with responsibility for safeguarding check carefully that procedures are followed and that the welfare, health and safety of pupils are secure.
- Trustees oversee the performance management of staff, including support staff, well. They make sure that good performance is rewarded and take action where there are concerns. Any complaints are carefully investigated and lessons learned. For example, guidance to, and training for, all staff about behaviour management and how the quiet rooms should be used has been strengthened recently.
- Trustees have a good understanding of the needs of pupils with autistic spectrum conditions. They ensure that pupils have all the therapy, advice and emotional support that they need. They make sure that checks on the suitability of staff and volunteers are carried out rigorously, and that staff have all the training they need. Recent improvements in the ways in which the school records any behavioural incidents or accidents enable them to analyse carefully how well staff follow the school's policies and keep pupils safe. The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- Good teaching, learning and assessment are underpinned by good staff training in, and understanding of, the most effective ways of helping pupils who have autistic spectrum conditions to learn and to manage their own behaviour.
- Detailed high-quality assessment around the time pupils enter the school, as well as close working with parents and placing authorities, mean that transition into the school is managed very well. Many pupils are unable to learn in groups at this point. The school environment and range of different rooms are used well to ensure that no pupil's learning or well-being are compromised. Very high staff–pupil ratios are often used to secure this.
- Staff are skilled at managing the learning and behaviour of pupils who have autistic spectrum conditions and emotional and behavioural challenges. They manage any incidents carefully so that the learning of others is rarely interfered with. Classrooms are often remarkably calm environments as a result.
- Throughout the school, class groups and the approach to learning are organised with careful consideration of each pupil's learning and emotional needs. A system of keyworkers and 'teams around the child' helps teachers to review each pupil's programme and its effectiveness carefully, and provides staff, as well as pupils, with support.
- Pupils improve their attendance and behaviour and their attitudes to learning significantly because staff are adept at gaining their interest and trust. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils, and very strong teamwork between all staff in the classroom, mean that staff provide very good role models for pupils about how to listen, attend and join in. As a result, as pupils progress through the school, they listen carefully to their teachers and are keen to share what they know and understand.
- Staff make good use of information available about pupils to plan and adapt work to meet each pupil's learning needs. This means that the work is almost always pitched at the right level of challenge and pupils are well informed about what they will do and why. Often this means that pupils have visual or written planners that help them to structure their day and anticipate 'reward or leisure times'. Occasionally, when pupils finish their work quickly, time for learning is lost because leisure time is extended rather than teachers capitalising on pupils' continued interest and providing them with more learning experiences.
- Teachers use daily routines and structured timetables well to help pupils to cooperate and learn effectively. All staff are skilled at communicating effectively with pupils and at building on the pupils' own communications, however small. This is because of the high level of expertise that teachers and therapists have in this area, and the high-quality resources that support pupils' understanding and expression. Visual support, signs, symbols, communication books and technological aids are used extremely well to help pupils express their ideas and emotions, to understand how others feel, and to learn.
- Good systematic support for early literacy and number skills means that pupils, including those within the sixth form, make good progress in these areas, often in small but significant steps. Sensory experiences help younger pupils to understand a story or to explore their environment with more confidence. Older pupils recognise key objects and use them to make simple choices. Higher attainers can read simple sentences and sound out new words.

- Learning is good because staff usually provide just the right amount of support to enable pupils to complete tasks for themselves. They are quick to signal to pupils how well they are doing and find meaningful ways of helping them to develop their skills further. For example, pupils research the best shop from which to buy a range of groceries and are keen to share their findings. They use a range of mathematical skills as they find the cheapest product of the right size.
- Staff's high expectations of behaviour and of independence mean that learners in the sixth form are prepared well for the next stage in their life, education and training. The good emphasis on life skills and on making choices means that they move forward well in their maturity and self-awareness, and develop their functional mathematical, English and other skills well. Teachers are quick to identify any talents and interests that pupils have, and to identify courses or awards linked to these. Learners develop confidence and improve their skills as they work on the school's farm and café or attend a college 'taster' course.
- Staff use vocational subjects, visits and visitors well to extend pupils' skills further and to promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. They ensure that pupils have many opportunities to practise skills linked to their personal targets and statements of educational needs or education, health and care plans. This means that pupils make particularly strong progress towards these personal targets. For example, they watch with interest, join in and learn from visitors who demonstrate circus skills to them. Pupils with more complex needs are happy to share their work with visitors, and learn to accept changes in routine.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Everyone in this school is highly focused on pupils' physical and emotional well-being. Staff work very well together to secure this and to help pupils to enjoy their learning where previously they may have hung back or reacted against it. Careful planning and teamwork ensures that almost all pupils re-engage with learning, and their attendance at and enjoyment of school improves.
- Pupils who have been wary of new experiences become more flexible because staff are skilled at preparing them and form strong relationships with pupils. Staff treat each pupil with respect and the ways in which they work with pupils and with each other help pupils to understand and develop such values as respect and tolerance.
- Careful working with parents, social care and pupils themselves ensures that pupils' needs are assessed accurately on entry, and that the right learning environment and emphases are provided. The extensive range of support available through therapies, keyworkers and different forms of communication support mean that pupils are enabled to have a 'voice' and influence their provision. Staff are ever vigilant to pupils' emotional well-being and to small signs of anxiety or pleasure that then influence how learning needs to be adapted.
- Occasionally it becomes clear that pupils' needs are so complex that they cannot be managed within the school or within groups. The school works hard with parents and placing authorities to resolve this and to find the best ways forward. Sometimes this is through intensive individual teaching within the school but, more rarely, this means that pupils are supported to transition to other settings. The focus on learning and promoting pupils' personal development and well-being remains high at such times.
- Careers education is carefully planned through the curriculum and the use of visits and visitors, as well as internal and external work placements. Pupils have access to a range of support from their placing authorities, as well as local careers services and the school's own staff. Sixth form learners have opportunities to practise skills in the school's farm, own shop and café.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well through the themed curriculum and assemblies. Pupils work in subjects such as art and food technology, which, together with their charity work and celebrations of festivals and special events for others, all help them to develop an awareness of others' lifestyles and needs. The very strong emphasis on supporting pupils' self-awareness, management of behaviour and willingness to engage with others means that their moral and social development is a particular strength.
- Staff are ever vigilant to pupils' safety and keep pupils alert to how to keep safe themselves. Pupils handle utensils well in cooking and in their life skills work. They move around the school sensibly and wait their turn well. Detailed risk assessments help to keep pupils safe and alert staff well as to how they should manage any incidents. If accidents happen, these are carefully recorded and dealt with.

- Staff have had appropriate training in keeping pupils safe and in recognising the signs that might indicate pupils' vulnerability to such issues as sexual exploitation or exposure to extremist views. Pupils who are able to speak show that they have a good understanding of the risks linked to internet use and are clear that there is no bullying in the school. They indicate that this is because staff take such good care of them and keep them safe.
- All the independent school standards relating to welfare, health and safety are met and checked on at the required intervals. Together with staff vigilance and planning, and the rigour with which the school checks on the suitability of staff, this all means that pupils are kept safe in an environment that has been adapted well for their needs.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. High staffing levels and careful deployment of staff mean that other pupils' learning is rarely disrupted when incidents occur.
- Many pupils did not attend school regularly prior to joining Sunfield School. However, attendance is good and parents and carers report their children being eager to attend, when previously getting them to school was a struggle. Many now attend 100% of the time. This is testament to the trust that pupils have in their teachers and the ways in which the school enables them to feel safe to learn.
- This willingness to join in and to learn is a real step forward for many pupils whose learning accelerates as a result. Pupils show their trust in staff by the ways they will have a go at new experiences and cope increasingly well with change.
- The assigning of a dedicated team to each pupil means that staff know each pupil extremely well and follow agreed behaviour management plans systematically. The consistency of this management, and of key language used, means that pupils are clear about what is expected and begin to have strategies themselves for managing their own behaviour. Consequently, behaviour improves greatly.
- Behaviour management has improved recently because the behaviour policy has been rewritten and staff have more detailed guidance as to when certain sanctions may or may not be used. Staff are now clear which strategies should be used routinely and which should only be used in exceptional circumstances. This has already improved the consistency of behaviour management for individual pupils, so that incidents have reduced in severity and frequency. Leaders are monitoring the implementation of the policy, checking carefully that all staff follow this guidance and that in pupils' behaviour management plans.
- Families and pupils are adamant that there is no bullying or 'unkindness' in the school but they are confident that if there were, school staff would sort it out fairly.
- Systems for recording any incidents and analysing them are robust. An electronic system is used effectively by staff and leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of pupils' behaviour plans but also to identify where something may have destabilised a pupil's well-being. All incidents of physical restraint are recorded carefully for appropriateness and safety. The school tries very hard to ensure that pupils' views are gained in some way, whether or not they have started to speak.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils enter the school with standards of attainment that are typically well below others of their age. This is because of the complexity of their learning needs and often their disrupted learning to date. Staff work hard to turn around pupils' attitudes to learning so that they are willing to join in lessons and most are increasingly happy to learn in small groups.
- The school's data show a higher percentage of pupils to be achieving above the progress typical of other pupils nationally with similar starting points. Work in books, observations in lessons and studying of pupils' records confirm this to be the case for the large majority of pupils in English and mathematics. In addition, pupils make at least good, and sometimes better, progress in their personal development. They are well set up for continuing to learn when they leave the school.
- Pupils in Key Stage 4 and learners in the sixth form leave the school with skills and qualifications that are highly relevant to their next placements. For most, these consist of pupils' progress awards at different levels where they have gained important self-help, communication, and early literacy and numeracy skills.
- A small number of pupils throughout the school have achievements in individual subjects such as art, mathematics, science or English that are closer to others of their age. The school has skilfully unwrapped these talents as pupils settle in and their capability becomes more evident. These pupils follow courses that lead to higher entry-level qualifications and short courses in GCSE or equivalent.

- The school is expanding the range of such courses. The leader responsible for most-able pupils has ambitious plans to ensure that such pupils have an increasingly mainstream-type experience. This includes inclusion opportunities at schools and colleges, while carefully keeping pupils' emotional and well-being needs at the centre. It is too early to see the full impact of such work. However, pupils' work demonstrates accelerated progress as they have been exposed to increasingly challenging work in English, mathematics and science.
- Those pupils with the most complex needs complete unit awards that lead to certificates and diplomas. Parents say that their children have achieved more than they thought possible and that this all helps them to be clearer about their child's future placement and learning needs. They praise the ways the school helps them to recognise and celebrate the small steps of progress, and helps them to build on these.
- All pupils make at least good progress in their literacy, numeracy, independence and life skills, and in their understanding of the world. Younger pupils willingly make marks on paper with paint and pencils and learn to follow instructions to complete their art models or cooking. Pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 make good progress as they organise the events in a favourite story. Older pupils can explain why a circuit does not work in science and what would make it work.
- Pupils are supported extremely well to make choices and express their views in productive ways. This is because therapists and school staff ensure that pupils have the resources they need to communicate effectively. Individual pupils use communication books highly effectively to express their feelings or to ask for something. Pupils who can communicate verbally expand their vocabulary and their language well because staff are skilled at extending their ideas and providing good models for them to learn from. Systematic support for reading with symbols or through phonics ensures that those, who are able to, learn to read and write well with these.
- Parents say they look forward to their children's letter home and these bear witness both to their child's progress and their increased confidence and skill in writing. Even pupils with the most complex behavioural needs were observed happily 'writing' these letters and in doing so, revisiting the language and learning experiences of the week. This helps to strongly reinforce key vocabulary and learning, and ensures that parents feel informed about, and involved in, their child's learning.
- Learners in the sixth form achieve qualifications and certificates in a range of subjects and practical skills, including art, English, mathematics and drama. All follow pupils' progress awards linked to the vocational and academic courses they study. These awards particularly reflect their life skills work and growing maturity and independence. Most-able sixth form learners and Key Stage 4 pupils join in youth club activity with pupils from a nearby mainstream school. They organise drinks and nibbles and write cards for every visitor with enthusiasm, remembering names and commenting on past meetings.
- The money received to support the learning of disadvantaged pupils is used well to provide additional experiences and support to these pupils. Their confidence and interest in learning grow, and they make progress at least as good as, and sometimes better than, their classmates.

Sixth form provision

is good

- The leadership and management of the sixth form is good. Leaders have improved the range of experiences that sixth form learners have, and are continuing to do so. They are extremely focused on skilling learners up for their next steps and ensuring that they move onto a placement or setting that best suits their needs and interests.
- Sixth form learners follow a varied curriculum that systematically builds on their existing skills, such as in English and mathematics, and introduces them to new situations and challenges. Work-related learning and practical courses help learners both to feel more grown-up and responsible and to prepare them for their future lives. Learners spend much time out in the community, whether buying resources for their food technology or business enterprise work, or on voluntary or college experiences. They work in the farm, shop or café, building well on experiences and skills they have developed in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.
- Sixth form learners say that they feel safe. They demonstrate good safety awareness as they talk about their experiences, use utensils and move about the school. They know they have had behavioural issues in the past but are proud of how they now deal with more challenging situations. They display empathy and care for younger pupils and respect and affection for the staff they work with, often sharing jokes and banter similar to others of their age.

- Detailed risk assessments ensure that learners are kept safe on outings and courses off site. Learners always have support from Sunfield staff, even when college staff lead these sessions. Staff ensure that learners have a good understanding about personal safety, including e-safety, and also how to recognise when others are trying to lead them astray. Learners are involved well in considering and reviewing their own programmes and progress, including identifying other subjects or courses they might wish to follow, either in school or when they move on to their next placement.

School details

Unique reference number	117033
Inspection number	10008859
DfE registration number	885/6024

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	24
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Sunfield Children's Home Ltd
Chair	Guy Brocklebank
Headteacher	Caroline Bell (Principal)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£64823–£82800
Telephone number	01562 882253
Website	www.sunfield.org.uk
Email address	mailto:carolineb@sunfield.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–13 December 2012

Information about this school

- Sunfield School is an independent special school for pupils who have complex learning needs, often linked to severely challenging behaviour. Most pupils, but not all, have autistic spectrum conditions, and some have identified mental health needs. Many have attended a number of schools before Sunfield, often with histories of poor or non-attendance. This includes pupils who have been excluded from schools or have been at risk of exclusion before entering Sunfield.
- Pupils attending Sunfield are drawn from all over England and Wales, as well as from more local West Midlands authorities such as Birmingham, Dudley, Wolverhampton and Worcestershire. All have a statement of educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- Sunfield is registered for up to 72 pupils and currently has 50 pupils aged six to 19 on roll. Pupils can enter the school at any point during their educational career, but most enter during their secondary school years.
- A high proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium but the school currently receives this for only a very small number of pupils.
- The school is located on the outskirts of a small village and in large grounds. It has its own farm and café facility and a small shop for staff and pupils within the school building.

- The school does not use alternative providers, but sixth form learners attend Kidderminster College on occasion for vocational courses. Learners are always accompanied by Sunfield staff on these visits.
- There have been changes in leadership since the last inspection. The previous headteacher is now the Principal of the wider Sunfield Children's Home Ltd. An acting headteacher, previously a deputy headteacher within the school, has been recently appointed and was in place at the time of this inspection.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at one day's notice.
- The inspector held discussions with senior leaders, representatives of the trustee board and other staff. She also held discussions with leaders responsible for different aspects of the school's work, such as child protection, behaviour management and emotional well-being, the sixth form, most-able pupils, and checking on the progress of pupils.
- She visited lessons to observe learning in all parts of the school, usually accompanied by a senior leader. These included some lessons where pupils were receiving individual support. In addition, she undertook several learning walks as well as inspecting the premises.
- The inspector examined a range of school policies and records. These included the school's self-evaluation and development plans and its health and safety procedures, including its fire risk assessments and first aid procedures. Records of incidents and accidents and the school's complaints logs and procedures were also scrutinised, as were those of checks made on the premises.
- The inspector considered the evidence the school collected as to pupils' progress and how leaders checked on this, and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Not enough responses were received to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire for these to be analysed. However, four parents did leave comments and the inspector had telephone conversations with, or written contributions from, a small number of other parents to inform an analysis of parents' views of the school. In addition, the school's own evidence from parents was considered, as were the views of placing authorities submitted during the 'point-in-time' survey to the Department for Education.
- The views expressed by school staff through 33 staff questionnaires were also considered.

Inspection team

Susan Lewis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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