

Inspection of Harbour Vale School

Simons Road, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 4DN

Inspection dates: 30 April to 1 May 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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The headteacher of this school is Kelly Knight. This school is part of Sherborne Area Schools' Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, David Watson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Middleton.

What is it like to attend this school?

Relationships with staff, built on trust and respect, help pupils to gain the confidence, resilience and independence to succeed socially and emotionally. The school is a calm and safe space for pupils.

Pupils who attend Harbour Vale School regularly are well-supported to recognise and manage their emotions. For example, counselling sessions enhance the school's social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) curriculum. The school's approach to behaviour management helps pupils and their parents to understand that staff care and want to support them. Pupils appreciate that staff listen to them and help them to prepare for their next steps.

A new ambitious curriculum has raised expectations of what pupils can achieve academically. Pupils enjoy participating in a wide range of enrichment activities. For example, pupils make pottery, learn to sail and carry out 'random acts of kindness' in the local community. These experiences help pupils to understand their place in society and successfully work as part of a team. The occupational studies curriculum ensures pupils develop important life skills. Their achievements are recognised through national qualifications.

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

The school is ambitious for its pupils. Trust and school leaders and staff share this vision. Pupils join the school if they have medical needs, are permanently excluded or are at risk of being excluded from their 'home' school. The school aims for pupils to successfully return to their home school or join a new mainstream school after twelve weeks. For some pupils, more time is needed to build their confidence so that they are ready to learn again.

When pupils join the school, there is a sharp focus on pupils studying the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) and SEMH curriculums. The school ensures pupils have the self-esteem to be ready to learn. Staff consistently set high expectations for pupils' behaviour and outcomes. The school develops positive working relationships with parents and external agencies to support pupils to improve their outcomes.

Staff development is prioritised to implement the school's ambitious curriculum. The school is currently improving leadership of curriculum subjects. For example, subject leaders work with colleagues from the trust's local secondary school. Staff are improving their knowledge of how pupils learn. This work is successful.

On entry to the school, some pupils are reluctant to read. However, the school helps pupils to overcome barriers to reading. For example, some pupils need additional support to understand what they read. Pupils are supported appropriately to develop their reading fluency and comprehension effectively. Consequently, some pupils enjoy reading and choose to buy books for themselves.

When pupils are emotionally ready to learn, staff focus on re-engaging pupils in learning so that pupils secure essential knowledge. Staff check for gaps in pupils' knowledge and adapt the curriculum to meet pupils' needs. However, this work is not well developed in some subjects. In these subjects, learning activities are sometimes too easy. Pupils' prior knowledge is not known. Therefore, the expectation for pupils' learning is too low in some wider curriculum subjects.

Topical discussions and debates are used well to ensure pupils learn the skills of listening and taking turns. Pupils grow to understand that people may have different points of view. Pupils learn that everyone is unique. Pupils are provided with impartial explanations as to why some views are unacceptable as British citizens. External speakers and regular visitors help to deliver important messages such as the dangers of knife crime and the importance of good sexual health.

There is a careers programme in place that helps pupils make considered choices about their future job options. Recent curriculum changes support the implementation of the careers programme. The introduction of occupational studies to the school's curriculum helps pupils gain first-hand experience in the world of work. For example, pupils learn about business studies and complete work experience in a local café.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes improve as their needs are well met. The school works with a wide range of external professionals and agencies to ensure pupils succeed. This includes supporting pupils and their families to overcome barriers that prevent them from attending school. Staff always checks pupils' safety and welfare if absent from school. Most pupils enjoy and attend school regularly.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has recently revised its curriculum. Staff do not have a secure knowledge of the content and expectations of the new wider curriculum. The school needs to support staff to develop their knowledge of the revised wider curriculum to accurately identify and close gaps in pupils' knowledge.

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	146958
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10322321
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy alternative provision sponsored
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	33
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
CEO of the trust	David Watson
Chair of trust	David Middleton
Headteacher	Kelly Knight
Website	www.harbourvale.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Harbour Vale School is part of the Sherborne Area Schools' Trust (SAST).
- Dorset County is the commissioning local authority for the school.
- Most pupils who attend the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs or Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD).
- The headteacher was appointed in June 2023.
- The school uses one unregistered alternative provider.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in the evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff, pupils and governors, including the chair of the academy committee, the current and previous CEO of SAST.
- The lead inspector spoke online with the Dorset local authority representative and the alternative provision used by the school.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils read to a known adult.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, science and art and design. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors also discussed the school's curriculum and provision with leaders.
- The inspectors observed pupils during social times and spoke with pupils and leaders about opportunities for pupils' personal development.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- The lead inspector considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. She also took into consideration the responses to the surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Marie Thomas, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

David Simons

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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