

Inspection of Kingsdown School

Snakes Lane, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS2 6XT

Inspection dates:	8 and 9 October 2024
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Good

The headteacher of this school is Lisa Stroud. This school is part of SEN Trust Southend, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Jackie Mullan, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Jane Oliver.

What is it like to attend this school?

Kingsdown is an exceptional school. Pupils thrive and flourish here. They love school. They develop excellent communication and independence skills. The staff know the pupils incredibly well. They ensure that every pupil is making progress all the time. Parents and carers feel well supported by staff and know that their children are safe and well looked after.

The school is a close community. Pupils enthusiastically celebrate others' successes in lessons and at celebration assembly. The very youngest quickly join in and take a full part. They sing or sign the school song with pride at being part of Kingsdown. At playtimes, the older pupils make sure that all peers are fully part of play. They help those who are non-ambulant join energetic dancing or calmer blowing bubbles.

The school has high aspirations for pupils. Everyone is included in everything. The school gives pupils high-quality opportunities, overcoming the challenges of disability. Pupils go to the beach to take part in teamwork and art projects. Many pupils are part of the orchestra and perform on stage with other schools. Pupils enjoy regular cycling; the wide range of bikes and trikes mean that everyone can enjoy the feeling of speed and success.

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

The greatest strength of this school is its staff and their expertise. These skills and knowledge have grown over time. Staff have had extensive training and opportunities to learn from each other. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and some pupils enter with increasingly complex needs, therefore, staff receive further specialist training. As a result, they have excellent knowledge of how to help pupils learn and develop. They use this to give pupils an excellent education.

Staff work very closely with parents and medical staff to ensure that pupils are safe and well cared for. They co-create detailed 'Hello, this is me' profiles. These help the class teams to understand how to support pupils effectively and know their likes and dislikes.

Every pupil has a personalised curriculum. This breaks down what pupils need to work on in different areas of learning into precise, bespoke steps. Staff then weave this into individuals' and classes' areas of interest to engage pupils in what they do. Every interaction becomes a quality learning moment. Staff regularly review and adjust the learning steps as needed. As a result, pupils make strong progress.

Communication and interaction are a high priority. The school uses a wide range of communication tools, including switches, symbol boards and signing. Many pupils become highly skilled in talking and/or signing. The oldest pupils talk confidently to unfamiliar visitors about their school. For those pupils learning to read, phonics is taught well. Pupils enjoy choosing books in the school library. They love the sensory stories, brought to life with objects, sounds and smells.

Pupils develop their independence well. Consistent routines and cues from staff help them be confident to try out new things and behave very well. Children in the early years quickly build up their ability to join in with group activities and concentrate for longer periods. Older pupils have responsibilities across the school. They are helped to think about what life might be like when they are older, for example taking part in work experience activities at a local supermarket. They learn life skills such as shopping and cookery.

Fundamental British values such as democracy are part of daily life. Pupils vote for activities in classes. Pupils respect each other and develop the ability to work with peers and as part of a team. As pupils grow older, they are sensitively taught about how their bodies change. They learn how to keep themselves safe.

Pupils benefit from the specialist sensory resource spaces. The youngest pupils practise balancing, throwing and catching in the large soft-play room. For example, pupils learn how to use switches to explore cause and effect by turning lights and bubbles on and off in dark rooms. The skilled way that staff use these, further ensures that pupils make excellent progress in all areas of learning.

Last year, most of the building was closed at short notice because of reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) in the roof. Leaders at all levels worked to ensure that pupils were able to continue their learning as soon as possible and that the quality of that education continued to improve. Trustees and governors know the school well and ensure their statutory duties are met.

Staff feel incredibly well supported. There is an established route for training staff to progress in their career, several qualifying as teachers. This has both retained and developed staff expertise, further benefiting the pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	144692
Local authority	Southend-on-Sea
Inspection number	10268023
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	132
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jane Oliver
CEO of the trust	Jackie Mullan
Headteacher	Lisa Stroud
Website	www.kingsdownschool.org
Dates of previous inspection	1 and 2 March 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. They have multiple and complex SEND.
- The school is registered for ages 3 to 14 but does not currently have any children of nursery age.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The parts of the school with RAAC have had remedial work, which has made the building safe to use again. The swimming pool is set to reopen this term.
- The school is part of the SEN Trust Southend. This is a multi-academy trust with four special schools, all in Southend-on-Sea.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements

(quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024, will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke to the headteacher, deputy headteacher, and other members of the school leadership team. They met with trustees and members of the local governing body. They met with the chief executive officer.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication (including early reading), physical development and creativity. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at their work.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects and visited other aspects of the schools' work.
- 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.

Inspection team

Tessa Holledge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Katie Devenport

His Majesty's Inspector

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