

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

Minehead Road, Aigburth, Liverpool, Merseyside L17 6AU

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 March 2025

Outcome

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

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils and the students in the sixth form are greeted warmly every morning by staff. Through exceptionally strong and trusting relationships, pupils relish learning across a wide range of subjects. They are bursting with excitement for the day ahead. They settle well into their classrooms. Through their actions or words, they show that they are happy in school. In part, this is because they trust the adults to look after them. Mutual respect between pupils and staff permeates through the entire school.

The school has soaring aspirations for pupils' achievement. It expects pupils to achieve everything that they are capable of. The school uses the information and targets from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans and weaves these into an ambitious curriculum with skill and precision. This results in pupils making strong progress from their individual starting points.

Staff manage pupils' behaviour well. They ensure that pupils consistently follow the school's rules and routines. This means that pupils typically learn in a calm environment. Pupils' behaviour does not usually interrupt other pupils' learning.

Pupils benefit from many opportunities to broaden their horizons beyond the school. This really helps them to be prepared for life after they leave Palmerston. Pupils enjoy opportunities to help in the community, learn how to travel independently using public transport or take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme.

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

Governors, working with the school, have ensured that pupils continue to flourish and achieve very well academically and socially. Pupils are very well prepared for their next individual steps in their education or life journey. The school's ambitious vision is shared by staff.

An essential part of the school's curriculum is ensuring that pupils develop effective communication and reading skills. Pupils who are at the early stages of learning to communicate begin by learning to use different methods and aids. They become proficient in expressing their wishes and feelings. This helps them with their early reading skills. Pupils have books that help them to practise the sounds that they know, which helps them learn to read well. They show a keen interest in books and discuss them well with staff. Over time, pupils become more confident communicators and readers.

Pupils study an ambitious curriculum. Pupils' targets are precisely linked to their next steps. Activities are skilfully designed to ensure that pupils get many opportunities to reach these milestones. Teachers use their expert subject knowledge and understanding of pupils' needs to ensure that they choose the best ways to deliver curriculum content. This helps pupils to flourish in their learning.

Pupils and sixth-form students are offered a suitable career programme that matches their needs and aspirations. This gives them sufficient information about their next steps and destinations. Pupils enjoy a wide range of opportunities to develop their life experiences outside of school. For example, the school uses local facilities to ensure that pupils learn key life skills in a realistic environment. It works closely with a local football team, which supports pupils with specific employability skills. Pupils have a secure understanding of equality. They also understand what makes a relationship positive and the meaning of consent.

Overall, pupils behave very well in school. At times when pupils need some additional support, staff act appropriately and support pupils well to manage their behaviour. Staff report any incidents swiftly. However, from time to time, the school does not use the information it holds to fully identify any patterns in pupils' occasionally less-than-positive behaviour. This limits how well the school can ensure that it responds to pupils' increasingly complex needs.

The school has taken an effective approach to improving pupils' attendance. It works with parents and carers to understand the specific reasons why pupils might not be in school. The school ensures that pupils with complex medical needs receive support and guidance when they cannot attend school. Recent attendance figures are showing an improvement for many pupils across the school. Governors keep a close eye on attendance, recognising the additional vulnerabilities of pupils.

Overall, staff are very positive and proud to work at the school. They value the different training opportunities that they receive. Many staff feel supported with their workload, including early career teachers.

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 does not consistently analyse the information that it holds about pupils' behaviour. This means that it is not able to fully identify any patterns or trends in how pupils behave. The school should strengthen this aspect of its strategic oversight.

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 to be 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in March 2015.

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	104748
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10347900
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	173
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Matthew Stockwell
Headteacher	Alison Buckley
Website	www.palmerstonschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	10 and 11 December 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils who attend the school have an EHC plan. The school caters for pupils with severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- A new chair of governors has been appointed since the previous inspection.
- The school operates across two sites approximately 3 miles apart. The post-16 provision is located at the school's Beaconsfield Road site.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors visited lessons, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. They also listened to some pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They met with school leaders to discuss pupils' rates of attendance.
- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. He also spoke with the school improvement partner as a representative of the local authority.
- 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 observed pupils' behaviour during lunchtime and as pupils moved around the school building. They reviewed leaders' records of pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at the school. They spoke with staff about their workload and well-being. Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text responses.

Inspection team

Stuart Perkins, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Gil Bourgade

Ofsted Inspector

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