

Inspection of Sunfield School

Clent Grove, Woodman Lane, Clent, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY9 9PB

Inspection dates: 16–18 November 2021

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Sixth-form provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Sunfield School provides pupils with a stimulating education that enables them to thrive. The trust's practical skills therapeutic education sets high expectations for all pupils. It enables them to make strong progress in education by taking part in meaningful activities within school and the community. Pupils' love of learning is clear to see.

Pupils benefit from a broad curriculum that helps them to make sense of the world around them. Their academic progress is developed well through the outdoor learning. Pupils' work in the gardens and farm helps to develop their independence and confidence. It also enables pupils to contribute positively to the community through selling pottery and vegetables in the school's shop.

Staff have a strong understanding of pupils' needs, including how to communicate with them. They respond to pupils' changing behaviours instantly, which helps to keep pupils calm. Staff's excellent management of behaviour means that pupils re-engage with education successfully. Staff are highly skilled at nurturing pupils. This helps pupils to form positive relationships and understand how to keep themselves safe. Staff and pupils celebrate their differences. They commit to 'diversity is the one thing we all have in common'.

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

The majority of pupils have had traumatic experiences of education prior to starting at Sunfield. Many pupils have had prolonged periods out of education. Pupils benefit from a curriculum that provides them with meaningful learning experiences. This enables them to progress towards independence and better engagement with society. The curriculum helps to successfully reintegrate pupils back into education.

Over time, staff's expectations of what all pupils can achieve have risen considerably. Staff look at pupils' needs holistically. They find out what pupils can do so that they can build on their strengths. The practical skills therapeutic education sets the foundations for the curriculum. By engaging with crafts, in the classroom and beyond, pupils immerse themselves into a whole therapeutic process. Through this, pupils learn academic and functional skills. They develop transferable work and independent living skills. Additionally, pupils learn to value themselves and others. Practical skills therapeutic education helps pupils to overcome barriers to learning and contribute to the school and wider community.

There is a broad, balanced and ambitious academic curriculum. Threaded throughout is the practical skills therapeutic education and outdoor experiential learning. From animal husbandry, growing and harvesting vegetables, to selling their pottery in the school's shop, pupils develop their academic skills well through the curriculum. Staff use every opportunity to promote learning, independence and creativity. The school's assessment system enables staff to break pupils' academic learning down into precise steps. Staff use this information well to plan what pupils

need to learn next. The system enables staff to identify pupils' holistic learning experiences, including communication and independent living targets.

Staff promote a love of reading well. There is a strong focus on developing reading skills through all learning activities. Texts are matched well to pupils' needs, with adaptations made so pupils can access the text. For example, pupils are reading an adapted version of 'A Christmas Carol'. Reading skills are also promoted through multi-sensory opportunities such as music and drama. Recently, leaders introduced a new scheme to further improve the teaching of phonics. However, staff have not yet received full training on the programme. As a result, there is variability in the quality of phonics teaching. This means some pupils do not make as much progress as they could in learning letter sounds.

Pupils' personal, social and health development is of a high quality. Activities, such as learning how to make emergency phone calls, help pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe. Learning about festival celebrations of Diwali and Eid widens pupils' understanding of other faiths and cultures. The 'Sunfield census' helped pupils to think about, and respect, their differences. The school's focused work within the community is a particular strength. This helps pupils to grow in confidence and belief that they can contribute positively to society. Pupils and students access high-quality and independent careers information advice and guidance. This guidance is successful at supporting pupils and students in accessing appropriate placements after leaving the school.

Staff's work to support pupils to manage their behaviour is exceptional. They are highly skilled at spotting when pupils' behavioural needs are changing and the reasons for the changes. They take swift action to provide pupils with effective support to overcome their difficulties. Staff also give pupils time and space in a safe environment to calm themselves. This prevents potentially challenging situations from escalating and enables pupils to return to learning quickly. There are very rarely any physical interventions needed because of staff's excellent behaviour support. Highly effective behaviour management also enables pupils to develop positive social interactions with their peers.

The trustees, director of schools and head of school are highly skilled and knowledgeable. Their work has resulted in the significant improvements made across the school. They have a detailed knowledge of how well the school is performing. They constantly look for ways to continue to improve it. Leaders are committed to providing pupils with an education that will enable them to reach their potential and contribute positively to society. The trust ensures that the independent school standards are consistently met and has ensured that the school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. They also ensured that the school effectively followed the government's relationships, sex and health education guidance when implementing this curriculum.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding procedures are followed by all staff. Every pupil has a detailed risk assessment that ensures all staff understand pupils' vulnerabilities. Leaders provide staff with specialist training where needed to ensure they understand specific pupils' vulnerabilities. This means that staff can quickly spot and report any concerns about a pupil who may be suffering from harm. Leaders respond immediately to any staff concerns. They work very effectively with a wide range of different services to keep pupils as safe as possible.

The school's safeguarding policy adheres to current government guidance and is published on the school's website.

What does the school need to do to improve?

- Leaders have recently introduced a new phonics programme, although staff are yet to receive full training on it. As a result, there is some variability in the quality of phonics teaching. This means some pupils do not make as much progress as they could in reading. Leaders should provide all staff with further support and training to improve the teaching of phonics. This will enable all pupils to make strong progress in learning to read.

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.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	117033
DfE registration number	885/6024
Local authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	10205085
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	39
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	10
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Sunfield Board
Chair	Helen Kippax
Headteacher	Tara Gratton (Principal), Christopher Lore (Head of School)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£73,429
Telephone number	01562 822253
Website	http://www.sunfield.org.uk/
Email address	sunfield@sunfield.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	25–27 September 2018

Information about this school

- Sunfield is an independent special school for pupils who have complex learning needs including visual impairments, autism spectrum disorder and pathological demand avoidance syndrome.
- All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is part of the Ruskin Mill Trust. This is a national charitable trust that runs other special schools and colleges for adults with complex needs. The Ruskin Mill Trust is inspired by the work of Rudolf Steiner, John Ruskin and William Morris.
- At the time of the inspection, the school did not use any alternative provision.
- The previous standard inspection was in September 2018.

Information about this inspection

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

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the director of schools, the head of school (who is also the curriculum leader), the student engagement manager and the admissions manager. Inspectors also met with class teachers. The lead inspector met with three members of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into reading and communication, personal, social, health and economic education, mathematics and science. For each deep dive, inspectors looked at curriculum planning and discussed this planning with the curriculum leader. They conducted joint lesson visits with leaders, spoke to pupils about their work and wider school experiences and looked at a range of pupils' work. Inspectors also reviewed work across the wider curriculum, including the outdoor and experiential learning.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of safeguarding information, including the school's safeguarding policy, spoke to staff and pupils about safeguarding and looked at how pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. The lead inspector spoke to the safeguarding leader about the reporting and recording of any safeguarding incidents.
- Inspectors took account of the parental free-text comments and the responses on Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also considered the responses to the staff survey.

There were no responses to the pupil survey. The lead inspector held two telephone conversations with parents.

Inspection team

Ann Pritchard, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Janet Satchwell

Ofsted Inspector

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