Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: The Parkside School, Norwich

College Road, Norwich, Norfolk NR2 3JA

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 May 2025

Outcome

The Parkside School, Norwich has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

This school truly lives its motto of 'learn, grow, thrive'. Pupils are excited to arrive at school to see their friends and find out what they will be learning. They make exceptional progress over time, both academically and personally, because of the school's high expectations and the high-quality education it offers. Pupils develop strong communication skills. They become confident in navigating the world beyond Parkside, travelling and visiting other places. Many pupils leave with qualifications that set them up well for college or other next steps.

The school is a happy and purposeful place of learning. Pupils focus well on what they are doing because of how well work is adapted to their needs. Playtime is a further extension of learning. The school has developed the limited space available to a high standard, and there are many different activities for pupils to engage with. They enjoy riding trikes, building houses, climbing and creating competitions.

Behaviour is excellent. Pupils who find it hard to manage their emotions are supported well to learn strategies to help calm themselves and re-focus. Staff are expert at stopping negative behaviours escalating. Where pupils have hurt or upset others, pupils have bespoke ways to reflect with adults that helps them understand what went wrong. This helps to keep pupils safe.

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

The school has a well-thought-out curriculum. It ensures that pupils get different experiences over time and repeats core learning so that they learn and remember more. Younger pupils have a high focus on developing communication skills. Pupils develop strong skills, either verbally or in using alternative communication aids. As they get older, this continues alongside a focus on becoming independent, regularly using local buses and public leisure facilities.

Reading is celebrated at Parkside. Pupils love sharing books with their teachers, joining in with familiar rhymes and anticipating funny sections with glee. Pupils make excellent use of adaptive systems that mean they can have books read to them or read alongside the narrator. Pupils access a wide range of books matched exactly to their reading stage. They enjoy reading both familiar books and new books suggested by their teachers. Phonics is taught well and is precisely matched to what pupils need to learn.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff in the school know pupils' individual strengths and needs well. They seamlessly adapt everything they do so that different pupils can access learning with the right level of support for them. The school has created systems that help staff see the detail of what progress pupils are making. Staff are highly positive about how these have supported them to further move pupils on, both socially and academically.

Staff make use of a range of symbols and physical images to help pupils understand new learning. Highly consistent and skilled use of signing supports pupils to learn new vocabulary and communicate with each other.

The school has many opportunities that go beyond the core curriculum. Pupils learn to canoe and ride a bike. They join in the signing choir, take part in a wide range of competitions and enjoy residentials. They take part in enterprise projects, making and selling their creations. All of this gives pupils a valuable set of experiences that they often struggle to access outside of school.

Pupils learn to play alongside others, and then to start collaborating in both work and play. Tolerance and respect are taught throughout. The school makes use of a wide range of images and books to help pupils understand cultural diversity. Pupils learn about careers and different life options open to them when they are grown up. The sixth form includes the opportunity to try out specialist courses, such as hair and beauty. Pupils regularly take part in work experience activities, such as land management in the Broads.

In the sixth form, there is a more grown-up atmosphere than in the main school, yet still with the care and supervision from their familiar adults. There is an emphasis on being ready for work and independence, together with continuing the focus on core reading, writing and mathematical skills. This prepares students well to be able to move on to larger further education settings in the future.

Leaders know their school extremely well. They continue to look for the small changes to further improve the school's provision. Staff feel incredibly well supported and talk about their enjoyment of working here. This, in turn, means that staff work with enthusiasm and create the best learning environment for the pupils in their care.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 third ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in October 2012.

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	121262
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10378492
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	7 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	189
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Paul Stanley
Headteacher	Carolyn Ellis-Gage
Website	www.parkside.norfolk.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	22 and 23 January 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school provides provision for pupils with a wide range of SEND. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The sixth-form provision is located across the road from the main building.
- The school uses a small number of unregistered alternative provisions.

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 spoke to the headteacher and members of the leadership team. They met with members of the governing body. They spoke to teachers and support staff.
- Inspectors visited a wide range of lessons. They looked at samples of pupils' work and curriculum documents. They spoke to pupils both in lessons and in groups out of lessons.
- 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
Jo Pedlow	Ofsted Inspector

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