

Inspection of Ellen Tinkham School

Hollow Lane, Pinhoe, Exeter, Devon EX1 3RW

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 April 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Early years provision

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Ellen Tinkham School is a warm, caring community. The school's vision that 'everyone will be the best that they can be' is evident in all aspects of school life. Pupils have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. These complex needs could become long-term barriers to learning and life. However, this is a school where there are the highest expectations for what pupils can achieve. Staff work tirelessly to break down barriers to learning. Consequently, pupils are happy, confident learners, well prepared for the next stage of their education and life in modern Britain.

Pupils feel well supported by staff, who build strong, caring relationships with them and their families. This helps pupils feel safe. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is positive. Well-trained staff support pupils who become unsettled to re-engage in learning. Bullying is not an issue in school. Pupils know that staff would intervene swiftly if it were to occur.

Leaders have created a highly inclusive school environment. Pupils have opportunities to take part in a wide range of activities outside the classroom. Staff find creative and imaginative ways to ensure that all pupils can participate, no matter how complex their needs are.

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

Leaders and staff are highly ambitious for every pupil. From the moment a child joins the school in the early years until a student leaves the sixth form, leaders want them to achieve their full potential, regardless of their additional needs. Starting in the early years, staff carefully identify each child's needs. This continues throughout the school. As a result, staff know the pupils, and their needs, well. Leaders use this precise knowledge to provide a personalised and ambitious curriculum. Pupils develop their knowledge and skills well across a range of subjects and become more independent because of this. They are well prepared for life when they leave school.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum in each subject sets out the important knowledge that pupils should learn. Beyond the core subjects of English, mathematics and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, teachers use themes to build on pupils' interests. However, in some subjects, staff teach outside their main area of expertise. As a result, there are times when learning is not closely matched to pupils' needs. This limits the achievement of these pupils.

Pupils in key stage 4 can select from a range of options. This helps to prepare them for the next stage of their education. Work experience and work-related learning start in key stage 4 and continue into the sixth form. This helps pupils to gain academic and vocational qualifications and the skills needed to be more independent.

Teachers use assessment effectively to identify and address gaps in pupils' understanding. This helps pupils to build knowledge securely over time.

Leaders place a high priority on reading. Pupils read often. Staff benefit from the training they receive to teach phonics effectively. Books that pupils read match the sounds they learn, which helps them gain confidence. Teachers ensure that learning is embedded before the pupil moves on to the next stage of the reading curriculum.

Personal development is a real strength of the school. The PSHE curriculum provides the basis for this. Pupils learn the importance of respecting people from different cultures and with different lifestyles. Leaders have a strong commitment to giving pupils a voice. Pupils value this and know that staff will listen to them. An impressive range of opportunities to learn outside the classroom helps pupils to build confidence and independence. Careers education starts with the pupils in primary years. It helps to build the pupils' aspirations for what they could achieve in the future.

Most pupils attend school regularly. Parents say that their children are eager to come to school in the morning. An enthusiasm for learning extends from children in the early years to the oldest students. Across both sites, pupils show very high levels of respect towards staff and each other. Staff endeavour to understand why a pupil's behaviour may become challenging and put the right support in place. As a result, disruption to learning is rare.

Leaders and governors engage with staff effectively. They are keen to ensure that staff do not experience undue pressure due to workload demands. Staff speak warmly about the care shown by leaders for their mental health and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding across both school sites. Procedures to check adults before their employment are robust. Staff are well trained. They receive regular updates to develop their practice further. Leaders keep detailed records and are quick to respond to any safeguarding concerns. They work well with external agencies. This ensures pupils receive support promptly. In addition, staff are aware of pupils' additional vulnerabilities due to their complex needs.

The school has suitable policies in place to raise awareness among staff and parents about the dangers of sexual harassment, online sexual abuse and sexual violence.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, teachers do not have the expertise to deliver the curriculum as intended. When this happens, learning is not sufficiently well matched to the needs of pupils. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Leaders should ensure teachers have the knowledge they need to deliver all subjects effectively.

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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	113633
Local authority	Devon
Inspection number	10256631
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	238
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	33
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Steven Finnemore
Headteacher	Nikki Burroughs
Website	www.ellentinkham.devon.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	10 and 11 March 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Ellen Tinkham School is a special school for pupils aged from three to 19 years. The school operates across two sites: early years and primary at Hollow Lane, and secondary and sixth form at Wayside Crescent.
- The school is federated with Bidwell Brook School in Dartington and together they form the Learn to Live Federation. The school is also part of the SENTient Trust with other special schools in the local authority.
- The school provides for pupils with severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorder and physical impairments.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The executive headteacher was appointed in March 2022.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, the head of college, and other senior and curriculum leaders.
- The lead inspector met with the chair and two other members of the governing body. The lead inspector also met with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, PSHE and physical development. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To assess the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised the single central record of recruitment checks and the procedures for safer recruitment of staff. The lead inspector held a meeting with the designated safeguarding leads to discuss actions taken following recorded concerns. Inspectors met with staff to check their understanding of safeguarding and the impact of the training received.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. In addition, inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Mark Burgess, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Hilary Goddard	Ofsted Inspector
Katie Brockway	Ofsted Inspector

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