

Inspection of a good school: Bowden House School

Firle Road, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 2JB

Inspection dates:

7 to 9 November 2023

Outcome

Bowden House School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff establish strong and caring relationships with their pupils, who are happy, secure and feel respected as a result. Sometimes, pupils find school hard. Staff understand this. They get to know pupils very well and make sure that they feel well supported and comfortable.

The school's family atmosphere makes a significant contribution to pupils' growing self-esteem and to their sense of belonging. For instance, the dining hall is prepared with care to provide a warm and welcoming space for pupils to enjoy breakfast and lunch. Parents appreciate the care and support provided for their children. One commented: 'Moving to this area and getting our son into this school was one of the best things we did.'

Pupils have individual plans to support their learning and development. Staff follow these plans carefully to ensure a consistent response throughout the school day. Well-established routines and clear expectations mean that pupils can feel confident about what each day will bring.

Lessons are undisturbed by poor behaviour, and staff respond calmly and consistently when this is not the case. This view is shared by pupils. Adults are skilled in spotting the early signs that a pupil is struggling and act swiftly to avoid pupils' frustrations from escalating.

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

Pupils have often experienced extensive disruption to their education prior to joining the school. The school prioritises helping pupils to rediscover an interest in learning and supporting them to re-engage with education. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance continuously, providing carefully placed support in partnership with parents. Leaders' successful strategies are reflected in improved attendance for individual pupils and in positive outcomes. Most pupils achieve GCSE qualifications in a range of subjects by the time they leave the school, including in English and mathematics, and go on to complete

college courses or apprenticeships. The school's art course is particularly strong and makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal and cultural development. They create work of exceptionally high quality and achieve extremely well in GCSE art.

Pupils' starting points are carefully assessed when they join the school. The school aims to identify the best curriculum route to ensure each pupil's success at GCSE. Ongoing assessments are used well to tailor the curriculum to their developing needs. Leaders have developed an innovative approach to involving pupils in tracking and celebrating their own progress. 'Sticker books' are used to record learning across a range of subjects so that pupils develop a sense of their own achievement. Pupils are generally well behaved in lessons because they feel valued, are clear about expectations, and want to do well.

The school's effective approach to teaching reading ensures that pupils make strong progress in this subject, although leaders rightly recognise the need to develop a more consistent and cohesive reading programme so that pupils at an early stage of reading do even better. Texts and activities are selected with care to appeal to pupils' interests, and various approaches, including phonics, are used to develop their reading skills. Pupils talk of their own success in being able to read words they were unable to read before.

Trips and activities are used well to interest pupils in their learning and to provide them with experiences beyond the classroom. Opportunities for pupils to discuss topical issues are regular features of the curriculum. For instance, during the inspection, a pupil spoke maturely and eloquently about what it means to be a refugee. Older pupils benefit from valuable careers advice, which includes individual discussions about future career options, visits to careers fairs, and opportunities to speak with colleges and businesses. Some attend local college courses in subjects such as vehicle maintenance, catering, and construction in preparation for future careers and employment.

The new leadership team has quickly established itself. Staff morale is strong. Staff say that leaders are considerate of their well-being and help them to manage their workload. Leaders have established a collaborative approach across the primary and secondary departments, including shared training and curriculum development. Governors are passionate about the school and committed to supporting its work. However, their roles in challenging school leaders and holding them to account for the quality of education are at an early stage of development. Leaders recognise that there is scope to strengthen governance further.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The secondary school reading curriculum has not been developed fully enough to support the increasing number of pupils joining the school at an early stage of reading.

As a result, these pupils do not always make the progress in reading that they could. Leaders have already implemented strategies to strengthen this aspect of the curriculum, with additional staff training in the teaching of phonics. They have suitable plans for further developments and should continue with these plans to ensure a more consistent and robust framework for the teaching of reading across the school.

- Governors' roles in challenging school leaders and holding them to account is at an early stage of development, particularly in relation to the curriculum and the quality of education. This hinders governors' effectiveness in monitoring the school's performance and in supporting its development. Leaders and governors should strengthen this aspect of governance.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 good in July 2014.

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	100986
Social care unique reference number	SC050152
Local authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	10268767
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	39
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	7
Number of boarders on roll	25
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Wendy Phillips
Headteacher	Neil Wells (acting headteacher)
Website	www.bowdenhouse.school
Date of previous inspection	11 January 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Bowden House School provides education and residential care for boys with social, emotional, and mental health needs. A small number of pupils have been diagnosed with autism and some have speech and language difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils are placed in the school by a number of local authorities, including Tower Hamlets, East and West Sussex, Brighton and Hove, and Thurrock.
- Bowden House School has a primary department, Bowden Primary School, which is located on the site of Ben Jonson Primary School, Harford Street, London.

- An acting headteacher, deputy headteacher, and head of residential were appointed from September 2023.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- 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.
- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the residential provision.
- Inspectors met with the acting headteacher, deputy headteacher, and other senior leaders. The lead inspector also met with the chair of governors.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection. They also considered the views expressed by staff in Ofsted's survey.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and art. Deep dives included visits to lessons, a review of pupils' work, and discussions with leaders, teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils in lessons, during the lunch break, and at other times of the school day.
- The lead inspector gathered parents' views through telephone discussions. She also held a telephone discussion with the headteacher of Bowden Primary School.
- 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

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Michelle Payne

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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