

Inspection of Snowfields Academy

Popesfield Way, Weaving, Maidstone, Kent ME14 5GA

Inspection dates: 27 and 28 June 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Snowfields academy are rightly proud of their school. They talk openly about feeling 'accepted' and 'comfortable'. Pupils fully appreciate being part of a community where everyone's differences are valued, nurtured and celebrated.

Pupils achieve exceptionally well, both academically and personally. The school's motto of 'where nurture meets aspiration' permeates the school. From the moment pupils join, they begin to develop the knowledge and skills they will need to move onto paid employment later in life. They work hard to gain appropriate, useful qualifications. In addition, everyone strives to ensure that pupils develop the self-understanding, confidence and resilience that allow them to live well with their autism. The school environment is thoughtfully designed. Pupils benefit from resources such as trampolines and the on-site working farm, which help them learn to self-regulate. These resources, alongside sensory equipment and quiet spaces to reduce stimulation, mean that pupils are able to access their learning fully.

The school values of 'be kind, work hard, communicate, stay safe and be happy' underpin everything. Pupils know and understand these values and work diligently to live up to them. They appreciate everyone's individuality and treat each other with consistently high levels of respect.

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

Leaders and staff have the highest ambitions for what pupils can achieve. The content pupils learn is considered carefully and organised meticulously. Teachers are highly skilled in delivering their subjects. All staff are experts in teaching and supporting pupils with autism. Teachers deliver activities in ways that engage pupils fully and get the best from them. Teachers monitor pupils' learning closely and ensure that pupils' individual, specific targets remain aspirational. Staff work collaboratively to support pupils to achieve their personal education, health and care plan (EHC plan) targets successfully alongside important qualifications. As a result, pupils thrive.

Pupils, including struggling readers, benefit hugely from a wide variety of useful additional help. They also benefit from working with a range of staff and therapists with specific, relevant expertise. Consequently, pupils can overcome any barriers to learning they have as a result of their special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Leaders have ensured that the focus on developing pupils' social communication is key. As a result of regular communication lessons, tailored to meet pupils' specific needs, pupils learn to understand themselves and the world around them.

Pupils are keen to come to school. This includes those who, prior to joining the school, were unable to attend school regularly due to their specific needs. This is because staff build trusting relationships with pupils quickly. The warm, friendly, supportive culture of the school is tangible.

Pupils are undoubtedly ready for their next stage of life when they leave Snowfields. They are encouraged to aim high. Pupils are supported well through useful careers information, education, advice and guidance to make informed decisions about their future. Leaders have an unfaltering focus on promoting pupils' personal development. They provide pupils with extensive, rich opportunities to develop their interests and talents. Pupils benefit from invaluable activities and clubs, such as the 'young farmer's club'. In this club, pupils were keen to show me their confidence and skill in grooming the heifers.

The weekly Snowfields celebration assembly is a highlight of the week. Pupils look forward to celebrating the successes of their friends, alongside their own achievements. 'Pupil ambassadors' play an important role in representing pupils' voices to leaders. They told us how tokens, given to reward excellent behaviour and attitudes to learning, can now be exchanged for rewards pupils have chosen themselves. Incentives such as these help to motivate and encourage pupils. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are exceptional and this can be seen consistently across the school.

Staff feel valued and extremely well supported by leaders. They fully appreciate the range of useful development opportunities they receive. Staff talk with warmth about the culture of mutual support that school and multi-academy trust leaders have created throughout the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff ensure that they get to know all pupils and their families particularly well, as quickly as possible. As a result of training, all staff are extremely knowledgeable about the additional safeguarding vulnerabilities of pupils as a result of their needs. Staff understand school safeguarding systems well, and any concerns are recorded and acted on swiftly. The wealth of pastoral and therapeutic support available means that pupils are well supported as soon as any concerns or worries are identified.

Staff help pupils to understand and manage risks effectively through the school's social, personal, health, emotions, relationships and employment curriculum.

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	147870
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10256254
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	176
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Frank Green
Principal	Dee Pickerill
Website	www.snowfieldsacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Snowfields Academy is a special school for pupils aged 11-18 whose primary need is autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The academy, part of the Leigh Academies Trust, has two sites, one in Bearsted, and one in Cranbrook.
- The academy opened in September 2020 on the Bearsted site, with the Cranbrook site opening in September 2022. The number of pupils on roll has increased year on year, and the sixth form is due to open to the first cohort of students in September 2023, on the Bearsted site.
- The academy currently uses no alternative provision.
- The academy meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The academy is a candidate school for the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme.

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 principal, school and trust senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and teaching assistants. The lead inspector also met with members of the board of trustees and the local governing body, and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: English (including communication), mathematics and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons with leaders, spoke to teachers, talked to or observed pupils and looked at their work or evidence of their learning.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils on both school sites.
- Inspectors looked at curriculum information, work and evidence used to gain pupils' accreditations, and a range of documentation, including for individual pupils. This included EHC plans, individual pupil passports and targets, and behaviour support plans.
- To look closely at safeguarding in the school, inspectors spoke to leaders, pupils, staff and governors. The lead inspector looked at a range of safeguarding documentation and systems, including the school's single central record, which contains details of recruitment checks.
- Inspectors considered 113 responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. They also considered the views of 18 pupils and 74 staff who completed the Ofsted surveys.

Inspection team

Maxine McDonald-Taylor, lead inspector Ofsted Inspector

Dave Euridge Ofsted Inspector

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