

Inspection of an outstanding school: Simon Balle All-Through School

Mangrove Road, Hertford, Hertfordshire SG13 8AJ

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 April, and 12 June 2024

Outcome

Simon Balle All-Through School continues to be an outstanding school.

The co-headteachers of this school are Michael Moss and Rachel Kirk. This school is part of The Laurel Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Rachel Kirk, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Paul Connolly.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive within the impressive positive ethos of this school. They are well equipped to become 'tomorrow's citizens today'. Pupils take great pride in demonstrating school values, such as compassion, kindness, respect and patience. Starting in the early years, pupils show remarkable care for each other. They learn how to understand each other's needs.

Pupils know that learning is important. Children in Reception Year delight in exploring the world around them. They sustain their concentration and focus on learning exceptionally well. Across the school, pupils work hard to learn and achieve. This helps them to reach the school's high expectations.

The school goes to great lengths to support pupils, whatever their need or barrier to learning. Carefully considered provision helps pupils, who find attending school challenging, to re-engage with school, attend more and begin to access learning.

Pupils benefit from the school's excellent enrichment provision. Pupils further what they learn in the curriculum by taking part in the school's extensive enrichment and clubs. For example, many pupils learn to play musical instruments. They also contribute towards the many weekly musical ensembles at the school. Older pupils enjoy supporting younger pupils in the primary phase.

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

The school has an ambitious and well-designed curriculum. Teachers are provided with very precise guidance about what pupils should know and understand. Using their expert subject knowledge, teachers implement the curriculum effectively. They provide pupils with well-considered opportunities to recall what has previously been taught. This helps pupils to secure their understanding of important knowledge. Teachers routinely check what pupils know and understand. When needs arise, teachers provide the support pupils need so that they do not fall behind. This helps pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, learn the curriculum well.

Published outcome across the primary and post 16 phases were very high in 2023. Some attainment measures at key stage 4 were high, although overall progress was average. There were a significant number of pupils with complex social, emotional and mental health needs in the key stage 4 cohort. Leaders acted with integrity to support and provide a bespoke curriculum for these pupils. Consequently, pupils achieved a wide range of GCSEs. The vast majority have remained in school or have progressed to meaningful next steps, such as post-16 education.

The school precisely identifies the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has a growing number of pupils with more complex needs, not previously experienced at the school. In response, the school has added a great deal of new provision and built staff expertise. This includes working well with external specialists. The school ensures staff are well informed to provide appropriate learning and adaptations for pupils with SEND. A minority of parents express a wish for their child to have even more support. However, inspectors observed pupils with SEND having their precise needs met and progressing very well through the curriculum.

Starting in Reception and key stage 1, pupils quickly learn what they need to read well. When pupils show signs of finding reading difficult, the school puts effective support in place. This helps pupils to follow the curriculum and keep up with their peers. The school provides pupils with an impressive array of texts matched to pupils' interests and reading abilities. Pupils enjoy the books read during lessons. Many pupils read for pleasure on a regular basis.

The school's expectations for how pupils should behave are well understood. Supported by the school's pupil parliament, leaders have recently refined their system of rewards and sanctions. Pupils appreciate the recognition and rewards they receive for demonstrating the school's values. Leaders check how well staff manage pupils' behaviour. Staff are consistent in the approaches they take. Pupils appreciate this consistency. As a result, pupils behave exceptionally well. They are pleasant, polite and caring young people.

The school provides amazing opportunities for pupils to develop as well-rounded people. Pupils are well prepared for adult life in modern Britain. For example, pupils have opportunities to visit places of national and international interest. In line with the school's inclusive ethos, leaders are proactive at supporting pupils to access clubs. Pupils also learn about different beliefs and lifestyles in contemporary society. Pupils learn how to

discuss controversial issues with sensitivity. They do this incredibly well. The school's careers provision is very well developed, which ensures that pupils have a comprehensive understanding of their career options. This helps to support pupils to be ready for their next stages.

The vast majority of parents and staff are very positive about the school. They value being part of the supportive school community. Staff appreciate the way governors and leaders are considerate of their well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

When we have judged outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in May 2018.

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	140294
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10295063
Type of school	All-through
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1597
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	223
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Connolly
CEO	Rachel Kirk
Co-headteachers	Michael Moss and Rachel Kirk
Website	www.simonballe.herts.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	9 and 10 May 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement 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.
- Very occasionally, Ofsted receives information after a visit to a school that may suggest there are gaps in the inspection evidence base, which will cause Ofsted to conclude that the inspection is incomplete. The inspection started on 24 April. Inspectors returned on 12 June to gather additional evidence in line with [Ofsted inspections and visits: Deferring, pausing and gathering additional evidence](#) policy.
- Inspectors held discussions with the trustees, the co-headteachers, members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders, teachers, members of support staff, pupils, parents and the school's school improvement advisor.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, geography and physical education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- 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.
- Inspectors evaluated the provision and impact for disadvantaged pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils in lessons and during social time.
- Inspectors looked at relevant documents, considered pupils' work and held discussions with leaders, staff and pupils about the provision for pupils' wider development.
- Inspectors considered the 156 staff responses, the 401 pupil responses and the 531 parent responses to Ofsted's online surveys. Inspectors also considered the letters parents sent directly to Ofsted and the letters sent to the school for the attention of inspectors.

Inspection team

Al Mistrano, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Nichola Pickford	Ofsted Inspector
Michael Skelly	Ofsted Inspector
Simon Rowe, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Jenny Thomas	His Majesty's Inspector
Paul Williams	His Majesty's Inspector

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