

Inspection of Stevenage Education Support Centre

Collenswood Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 9HQ

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 May 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Stevenage Education Support Centre (SESC) provides exceptional support for its pupils. They thrive here.

Pupils have a vast range of opportunities closely tailored to meet their needs. Pupils in key stage 4 take part in work experience. Many attend college for a day a week. They encounter many local employers. These activities teach pupils about the world of work. Pupils receive support with interviews and applications, even after they leave SESC. Pupils are therefore fully equipped to make informed, ambitious choices about their next steps. Pupils in key stage 3 receive exceptional support which helps them return successfully to full-time education in schools.

The school uses carefully chosen visitors to teach pupils how to stay safe. They learn about the dangers of drugs and the importance of consent. Pupils gain new skills and interests, from mixed martial arts to cookery and sailing.

Pupils greatly improve their behaviour, attendance, and attitudes to learning while they are here. Mentors and staff work closely with pupils to develop their self-esteem. They feel safe and valued. With the support and encouragement of staff, pupils learn how to manage challenging situations. As a result, pupils leave SESC much more confident and resilient than when they arrive.

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

The curriculum at SESC is hugely ambitious for every pupil. When pupils arrive, staff rigorously check what pupils know, and find out how they learn best. Staff identify how well pupils can read. They use this information to plan a tailored curriculum that precisely meets the needs of each pupil. They identify the important knowledge and skills that pupils need. Teachers regularly revisit previous knowledge in lessons. This makes knowledge stick and gives pupils the confidence to move securely onto new content. Teachers identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. They plan the curriculum to close these gaps so that pupils can go back to school with the knowledge they need. Pupils who find reading difficult are given help by trained staff. This helps them rapidly improve their ability to read so that they can access the curriculum.

In lessons, staff work tirelessly to help pupils take on demanding tasks. They adapt the curriculum with great skill, including for pupils with education, health, and care plans (EHCPs). Consequently, pupils make exceptional progress in their time here. All pupils gain GCSEs in English, mathematics, and science. Key Stage 4 pupils follow a wide range of vocational courses. These are linked to college and work experience opportunities and provide pupils with valuable qualifications.

The environment at SESC is exceptionally calm and positive. Staff have very high expectations of pupils' behaviour. They are always patient and consistent in how they support pupils to meet them. When pupils become dysregulated, staff work with them to understand what went wrong, and how to improve. In their time here,

pupils develop highly positive relationships with staff and each other. They look forward to coming to SESC. Most pupils improve their attendance considerably. When pupils in Key Stage 3 are ready to return to their home school, staff help them return successfully. The commitment of staff is exemplary. Staff go into schools with pupils and share practical advice with their teachers on how to meet their needs.

Pupils follow a precisely planned personal, social, and health education (PSHE) curriculum which prepares pupils superbly for adulthood. They learn about topics such as healthy relationships and how to manage money. Trips to the seaside and theatres give pupils a rich range of experiences. They learn about the importance of community by raising money for charity.

Staff at SESC are relentless in their determination for every pupil to flourish. As one parent put it, 'they move heaven and earth' to help each pupil overcome obstacles to success. Leaders, including governors, rigorously check how well the centre's work is meeting the needs of pupils, including how well pupils are kept safe. Staff are very well supported with their well-being.

SESC provides exceptional support for families and local schools. They deliver many sessions that teach parents how to access help and support their children. The support that SESC provides for pupils from other schools helps improve their behaviour so that they are not excluded from school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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	130359
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10323688
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	32
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Emma Flawn
Headteacher	James Anderson
Website	www.stevenage-esc.herts.sch.uk
Date(s) of previous inspection	29 March 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Stevenage Education Support Centre is a member of the Nexus Federation with North Herts Education Support Centre. Dan Nearney is the executive head teachers of both pupil referral units.
- Pupils in Key Stage 3 attend SESC on short term placements before they return to mainstream school. These pupils are dual-registered with the school from which they came. Pupils in Key Stage 4 are usually on longer placements and are solely on SESC's school roll.
- Key Stage 4 pupils attend weekly further education courses at college or carry out work experience. The school currently uses four registered alternative provisions for pupils.
- The school offers alternative provision for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion from local secondary schools.
- 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

The inspector(s) carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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.
- The lead inspector spoke to the members of the local governing board, as well as a representative from the local authority. He also spoke to leaders from local secondary schools whose pupils attend SESC.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, and hospitality and catering. 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.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects and visited a range 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.
- Inspectors held meetings with a range of leaders including the assistant headteacher responsible for careers, and the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator.
- The lead inspector met with the early career teacher and staff involved in the induction of new teachers.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at other times around school. They met with groups of pupils to discuss behaviour in the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of records relating to behaviour and attendance.
- The lead inspector considered the 18 responses and 12 free-text responses received during the inspection to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. He also considered the 23 responses to Ofsted's staff survey and the 8 responses to the pupil survey. He also spoke to 2 parents on the phone.

Inspection team

Steve Woodley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Fiona Webb

Ofsted Inspector

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