

# Cornfields School

207 Hythe Road, Ashford TN24 8PL

## Inspection dates

7 November 2024

### Overall outcome

**The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection**

## Main inspection findings

### Part 1. Quality of education provided

#### *Paragraphs 3 and 3(f)*

- At the school's last standard inspection in March 2022, inspectors found that the independent school standards (the standards) in this part were met.
- There has been significant turmoil at the school over the past months. This progress monitoring inspection found that the school does not provide teachers with sufficient resources and materials to deliver the curriculum. Teachers routinely purchase their own resources or bring them from home to provide lesson activities. This includes basic items such as stationery and art supplies. The school does not allocate funding appropriately to meet the needs set out in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Some pupils who require access to specialist therapies or resources, including those stated in their EHC plans, are not provided with these.
- Some of the standards in this part are unmet.

### Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

#### *Paragraphs 14 and 15*

- At the school's last standard inspection in March 2022, inspectors found that the standards in this part were met. Paragraph 14 was also found to be met at an emergency inspection carried out in February 2024.
- The school ensures that pupils are appropriately supervised in class as well as during social times.
- The school keeps an accurate admissions register that contains all the required information. Daily attendance is recorded accurately and held centrally in an electronic system.
- These paragraphs of the standards continue to be met.

#### *Paragraphs 7 to 7(b)*

- At the emergency inspection in February 2024, these standards were found to be met.

- The school's safeguarding and child protection policy is not fit for purpose. The guidance in this policy does not align with the relevant statutory guidance. Some of the information in the policy is incorrect. Parts of the policy do not provide enough information to teachers, for example about how to escalate concerns regarding an adult who is working with pupils.
- The school's leaders do not have sufficient oversight of the safeguarding policy. Changes were made to the policy without their knowledge and the new policy was posted on the school's website. During the inspection, leaders were unable to determine who made these changes.
- Many pupils do not feel comfortable talking to adults in school if they have a concern. Although some pupils form trusting relationships with their teachers, they lack confidence in the school as a whole to provide them with support and protection.
- Staff lack confidence in the leadership of the school and the proprietor body. The school's culture has been negatively affected by successive changes to leadership since the last inspection in February. This has led to a lack of trust and transparency and is preventing the school from maintaining an open and positive culture around safeguarding.
- The proprietor body has not ensured that staff have an adequate understanding of physical interventions and when it is appropriate to use these. Although physical interventions are being used rarely, the lack of expertise in the school is placing pupils and staff at additional risk.
- The requirements set out in these paragraphs are not met.

#### Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

##### *Paragraph 21(1)*

- At the emergency inspection in February 2024, these standards were found to be met.
- The school keeps a record of pre-employment checks carried out on new staff. This record is for staff across the two schools run by the proprietor body. It is not possible to ascertain from this record which members of staff work at each school.
- This paragraph of the standards is unmet.

##### *Paragraphs 18(2)(a) to 18(2)(d), 19(2)(a)(i)(aa) to 19(2)(a)(i)(cc), 19(2)(a)(ii) to 19(2)(d)(ii) and 19(3), 21(2), 21(3)(a)(i) to 21(3)(a)(vii), 21(3)(b), 21(5)-21(5)(c)*

- At the emergency inspection in February 2024, these standards were found to be met.
- The school's single central record indicates that many of the necessary pre-employment checks are completed for new staff. Where the school uses supply staff, it seeks appropriate assurances that the necessary checks have been completed.
- These requirements of the standards are met.

##### *Paragraphs 18(2), 18(2)(e), 19(2) to (19)(2)(a)(i), 19(2)(a)(i)(dd), 21(3), 21(3)(a) and 21(3)(a)(viii)*

- At the emergency inspection in February 2024, these standards were found to be met.
- Where supply staff have later been employed on a permanent basis, the school does not always ensure that a full recruitment process takes place. Some staff have not

completed an application form, as required in safer recruitment processes. This has led to checks being missed for staff who have lived and worked overseas. Where these checks are missing, they have been entered incorrectly onto the school's single central record.

- These requirements of the standards are not met.
- Since the last inspection, the previous two members of the proprietor body have resigned, and a new chair has been appointed. This person is now the only director of the proprietor body. An application for the necessary checks on suitability has been made to the Department for Education (DfE). At the time of the inspection, these checks had not been completed.

## Part 6. Provision of information

### *Paragraphs 32(1) and 32(1)(c)*

- At the emergency inspection in February 2024, these standards were found to be met.
- Although there is a child protection and safeguarding policy published on the school's website, this document is not fit for purpose.
- These requirements of the standards are unmet.

### *Paragraph 32(1)(i)*

- At the school's last standard inspection in March 2022, inspectors found that this requirement of the standards was met.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has failed to provide statutory information to local authorities to enable annual reviews of some pupils' EHC plans. This has prevented pupils' EHC plans from being updated as quickly as they should be.
- This requirement of the standards is also unmet.

## Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

### *Paragraphs 34(1) to 34(1)(b)*

- During the emergency inspection in February 2024, inspectors found that there was considerable instability in the school's leadership. As a result, leaders lacked a secure understanding of the extent to which the school met the standards. Leaders also lacked oversight of some operational aspects of running the school.
- Since the previous inspection, there has continued to be instability in the school's leadership with several changes of headteacher. Following a substantial reduction in the number of pupils on roll, the proprietor body took the decision to restructure the school's staffing. This decision has led to further changes to staffing and leadership roles. At the time of this inspection, the school's headteacher had only been in post for a few days. He was previously appointed as the headteacher of the other school run by the proprietor body, and now oversees both.
- The new chair of the proprietor body took up the post on 24 October 2024. At the time of this inspection, he had not yet visited the school.
- School leaders do not have an adequate understanding of how the school operates. For example, the headteacher is unable to explain how funding is allocated in the school. The headteacher found it challenging to provide the documents requested during the

inspection. Some documents are held externally and the headteacher is unclear about who has access to confidential information such as staff personnel files.

- Leaders and the proprietor body have not ensured that the school continues to meet the independent school standards.
- These requirements of the standards are still unmet.

*Paragraph 34(1)(c)*

- At the emergency inspection in February 2024, these standards were found to be met.
- Leaders have not ensured that there is an open and positive culture in the school, including in relation to safeguarding. Standards relating to safeguarding are unmet.
- These requirements of the standards are also unmet.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school meets the requirements of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 by producing and publishing a suitable accessibility plan and objectives.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection, as set out in the annex of this report. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

## School details

Unique reference number	146521
DfE registration number	886/6152
Inspection number	10370484

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	17
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Keefields Ltd
Chair	Ian Mullins
Headteacher	Tony Thompson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,500
Telephone number	01233877046
Website	<a href="http://www.cornfields.kent.sch.uk">www.cornfields.kent.sch.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:Office@cornfields.kent.sch.uk">Office@cornfields.kent.sch.uk</a>
Date of previous standard inspection	15 to 17 March 2022

## Information about this school

- Since the school's last inspection in February 2024, there have been three changes in headteacher and a restructure to the school's leadership. The school's headteacher had been in post for a week at the time of the inspection. Some staff, including the headteacher, now work across this school and another school owned by the same proprietor body. Recently, the number of pupils in the school has reduced dramatically.
- All pupils at Cornfields have an EHC plan relating to social, emotional and mental health needs. Their places are funded by a local authority. The school is registered to admit up to 50 pupils. There are currently 17 pupils on roll: 16 placed by Medway local authority and one by the London Borough of Islington.

- Cornfields School is owned by Keefields Ltd. It was purchased by the new chair of the proprietor body, who has been in post since 24 October 2024. Suitability checks with the DfE have been applied for. The chair of the proprietor body is the only director and is also the school's chair of governors. The proprietor has appointed an experienced safeguarding governor. This governor is working with the previous chair of governors for continuity.
- The proprietor body operates two schools. The other school is Belle Vue School in Cranbrook. These schools are registered and inspected separately.
- The school currently makes use of one unregistered alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the DfE, which is the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- The school received its last standard inspection in March 2022. The school received an emergency inspection in February 2024, where inspectors found that not all the standards were met. This inspection was the first progress monitoring inspection since then.
- Following the school's emergency inspection in February 2024, the DfE required the proprietor body to produce a statutory action plan. The plan was submitted on 24 July 2024. It was evaluated as acceptable by Ofsted on 29 August 2024 and accepted by the DfE on 11 October 2024.
- This inspection was conducted without notice and lasted one day.
- The inspector spoke with leaders, pupils and staff during the inspection. The inspector also scrutinised a range of documents relating to the school. The inspector held conversations with the two local authorities that commission places at the school.
- Before the inspection, the inspector checked the school's website and considered all relevant information about the school.

## Inspection team

Chris Ellison, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector



## **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

### **The school does not meet the following independent school standards**

*Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and remain un-met at this inspection*

#### **Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
  - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
  - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and

*Standards that were met at the previous inspection, but are now judged to not be met at this inspection:*

#### **Part 1. Quality of education provided**

- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
  - 3(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;

#### **Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
  - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
  - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

#### **Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors**

- 18(2) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
  - 18(2)(e) in the case of any person for whom, by reason of that person living or having lived outside the United Kingdom, obtaining such a certificate is not sufficient to establish the person's suitability to work in a school, such further checks are made as the proprietor considers appropriate, having regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State; and
- 19(2) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
  - 19(2)(a) a person offered for supply by an employment business to the school only begins to work at the school if the proprietor has received-
    - 19(2)(a)(i) written notification from the employment business in relation to that person-
    - 19(2)(a)(i)(dd) that, where that person is one for whom, by reason of that person living or having lived outside the United Kingdom, obtaining such a certificate is not sufficient to establish the person's suitability to work in a school, it or another employment

business has obtained such further checks as appropriate, having regard to any guidance issued by the secretary of state; and

- 21(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor keeps a register which shows such of the information referred to in sub-paragraphs (3) to (7) as is applicable to the school in question.
- 21(3) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is-
  - 21(3)(a) in relation to each member of staff ("S") appointed on or after 1st May 2007, whether-
  - 21(3)(a)(viii) checks were made pursuant to paragraph 18(2)(e),

## **Part 6. Provision of information**

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that-
  - 32(1)(c) particulars of the arrangements for meeting the standard contained in paragraph 7 are published on the school's internet website or, where no such website exists, are provided to parents on request;
  - 32(1)(i) where a pupil with an EHC plan wholly or partly funded by a local authority or other body through public funds is registered at the school, such information as may reasonably be required for the purpose of the annual review of the EHC plan is provided to the responsible local authority; and

## **Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
  - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

### Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2024