

Inspection of Cornfields

207 Hythe Road, Ashford, Kent TN24 8PL

Inspection dates: 26–28 November 2019

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils come first in this happy, welcoming school. Cornfield's motto, 'Improving life chances', lies at the heart of all it does. Pupils have often had a difficult time in the education system in the past. Adults build exceptionally strong relationships with pupils. Pupils respect adults and each other. They feel secure.

Pupils enjoy school. They want to learn and are keen to do well. The school's quiet, calm atmosphere means that pupils can get on with what they need to do. Pupils behave very well throughout the school. They work hard in lessons. Pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs mean that individual pupils become anxious or agitated from time to time. Adults understand pupils' circumstances very well. They sort out any problems quietly, sensitively and without fuss. This means that situations rarely escalate. Pupils told us that there is always someone on hand to help if they are worried. Leaders do not tolerate bullying of any kind.

Adults expect every pupil to work hard and to behave sensibly. They plan learning with great care. Pupils learn new things, develop self-respect and make plans for the future. They told us that they like making friends and having people to talk to.

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

Sometimes pupils have been out of formal education for a long time before joining the school. They often have a low opinion of education and of themselves. Poor attendance and many school changes leave pupils with large gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Leaders use pupils' education, health and care plans to shape learning for each pupil. They start by checking that pupils' EHCPs are appropriate when they join the school. They rewrite EHCPs where necessary, working closely with parents, health specialists and the local authority. This ensures that teachers have a crystal-clear view of pupils' starting points and targets. Leaders use each pupil's EHCP to construct a detailed learning programme.

Leaders know that being able to read is central to pupils' future success. They have developed an intensive reading programme, including phonics teaching, which works. Pupils' reading skills improve quickly. The school provides a range of high-quality books. Pupils read to an adult most days.

Some subject plans are at an early stage of development. The history and geography programmes, for instance, need further development, particularly to meet the needs of the most able pupils. Leaders are well aware of this. They have started to take action to develop the curriculum further.

The school prepares pupils exceptionally well for their future lives. Subjects such as car maintenance, beauty or equine studies, for example, help the older pupils to think about what they would like to do in the future. The school achieves remarkable success in improving pupils' behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning. Pupils who have previously struggled in education are pleased to be in

school. They behave very well and attend regularly. This has a significant effect on pupils' learning.

Regular visits, such as the recent trip to The House of Commons, bring learning to life and extend pupils' horizons. Some pupils learn to play a musical instrument and all pupils complete St John's Ambulance first aid courses. Pupils regularly join in with charity events. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about plans to take part in 'The Big Sleep', an event to raise funds for homeless people. The head girl and head boy provide strong role models for others. They are fiercely proud of their school.

The headteacher provides strong direction for the school. She is determined to give every pupil the best opportunity to succeed. The headteacher sets a strong example for pupils and staff alike. She is supported by a skilful team of leaders. Staff are proud to work in the school. They told us that the headteacher 'is always there for us and always has time to listen'.

Leaders, governors and proprietors make sure that the independent school standards are in place. They make sure that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Governors make sure that the school is safe and well equipped. They regularly ask challenging questions during governors' meetings about safeguarding, resourcing, and operational issues. Their roles in holding leaders to account for the quality of education are less well developed.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders are uncompromising in their commitment to ensuring that pupils are safe, comfortable and valued. Staff and governors act quickly if any worries about pupils' safety arise. Leaders work closely with agencies such as children's services.

Leaders devise behaviour support plans which are unique to each pupil. This means that staff know how to respond when a pupil becomes distressed or agitated. They follow pupils' individual behaviour plans carefully. The school uses physical intervention as a last resort and only in the most challenging circumstances. It is rarely used. Parents say that their children are happy and safe in school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders have focused on establishing the English and mathematics curriculum since the school opened. They have done this well. Leaders are now turning their attention to other subjects. For instance, they know that the history and geography elements of the school's 'creative curriculum' provide insufficient depth and challenge, particularly for the most able pupils. Leaders have suitable plans in place to improve this aspect of pupils' learning. For example, they will use staff

training to strengthen teachers' subject knowledge. They plan to link school trips more closely with the geography and history curriculum so that learning in the classroom is more meaningful. Leaders should continue with this work so that the pupils of all abilities benefit from a rich and challenging curriculum and achieve well.

- The chair of governors is experienced and highly knowledgeable about education. He is very clear about what the school is doing well and about further developments needed. Other governors tend to rely on him to hold leaders to account for the quality of education. The chair of governors has already identified the need to strengthen governors' roles in challenging leaders about the quality of education. Leaders should continue with plans to develop this aspect of governance so that the governing body holds leaders to account for the quality of education more rigorously.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	146521
DfE registration number	886/6152
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10100150
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	19
Number of part-time pupils	5
Proprietor	Keefields Children's Services
Chair	Timothy Cook
Headteacher	Mary McKeeman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,500
Telephone number	01233 877046
Website	www.cornfields.kent.sch.uk
Email address	info@cornfields.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Cornfields is an independent day special school. It caters for pupils aged between 7 and 16 years of age.
- The school is registered for 50 pupils. There are currently 19 pupils on roll.
- Pupils have a range of special educational needs including autism, communication and learning difficulties and social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- Pupils are placed in the school by Kent local authority. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils have often experienced a disrupted education prior to joining the school. Some have been out of formal education for an extended period of time.
- The school does not use alternative provision. However, a number of pupils complete courses, such as equine studies and car maintenance, in registered providers, including Nelson Park Equestrian Centre and Rowhill School.
- The school opened in February 2019. The first pupils were admitted in April 2019.
- This was the first standard inspection since the school opened.

Information about this inspection

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

- We met with the headteacher, the operations manager, the chair of governors and with other school leaders. We also held discussions with staff and pupils, including the head boy and head girl.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, nurture and the creative curriculum. We spoke with the leaders for these subjects, looked at curriculum documents, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked with pupils and teachers.
- We checked the school's safeguarding arrangements. We held discussions with leaders, spoke with staff and observed the everyday work of the school. We reviewed a range of safeguarding records. We also scrutinised the single central register of staff suitability to work with children and looked at school records.
- We considered the views expressed by 10 parents who completed our inspection surveys and two who commented through free-text. We also spoke with a parent during the inspection.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Sue Bzikot

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