

Cornfields

207 Hythe Road, Ashford, Kent TN24 8PL

Inspection dates

22 January 2019

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4

- The proposed school's core purpose is 'to improve the life chances of children'. The stated goal is to reverse and eradicate the known correlation between poor outcomes in life and factors that have made pupils vulnerable to underachievement at school. These circumstances include those of children looked after, disadvantaged pupils and, in particular, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- It is obvious that the headteacher has high expectations of what can be achieved by the type of pupils the school proposes to admit. There is clear and well-thought-through intent to strive to bridge the gaps between pupils' current attainment, their cognitive abilities and their long-term potential. Wisely, the proprietor has already sought advice from an educational psychologist in conceiving and making plans for the school. The intention is to sustain this potentially very beneficial link.
- The proprietor anticipates that pupils at the school will usually have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The headteacher is rightfully keen to make the best possible use of the professional assessment the EHC plan should provide to arrange suitable provision and subsequently check pupils' progress. There are realistic and well-conceived plans for a range of other assessments to determine pupils' current capabilities, future potential and interim progress.
- The headteacher has carefully considered how she intends to group pupils to take account of not just their ages but also their learning and sensory needs. She is also suitably mindful of preparing older pupils for the next stages of their lives and education. Pupils will be offered opportunities to gain a range of certificates, qualifications and accreditations according to their capabilities. Arrangements for impartial careers guidance are likely to meet requirements.
- Sufficient plans and schemes of work are in place to support teachers in planning and implementing a suitable curriculum. The headteacher intends to ensure that these are properly adapted to meet the needs and interests of pupils. She can illustrate how this will be achieved with specific examples.

- The unashamed emphasis of the curriculum is to promote levels of literacy and numeracy, alongside personal attributes and life skills that will enable pupils to do well in their later lives. Despite this emphasis, the plans indicate that there is likely to be sufficient breadth of learning to meet requirements. The intention is to appoint staff with suitable subject expertise, although there will be some overlap in subject specialism initially, as the school grows. The headteacher proposes to keep a close oversight of teaching and learning to assure herself that the best possible quality is offered to pupils.
- The school is likely to meet all the requirements of this part of the independent school standards.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5

- Through discussion and their documentation, leaders convey a strong and positive ethos. The proprietor identifies the school's 'driving principles' as 'belonging, citizenship, participating, resilience and being healthy and safe'.
- Plans and schemes of work for citizenship make reference to fundamental British values and provide reasonable opportunities for teaching pupils these concepts. As with personal, social, health and economic education, the intent is to combine direct teaching with the reinforcement of common values that are threaded through all that the school does.
- The headteacher has earmarked plausible opportunities to enrich the school-based curriculum by broadening pupils' experiences within the local community and beyond.
- The range of available evidence undoubtedly indicates a culture of respect for difference. There is no detectable suggestion at this early stage of direct or indirect discrimination by the omission of any group. However, plans and schemes of work are not as explicit as they could be about how the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Equality Act will be considered. The headteacher understands this point and is committed to strengthening this aspect of the school's plans and approach.
- The standard contained in this part is likely to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 6 and 7

- It is likely that safeguarding pupils will be suitably prioritised. The headteacher is knowledgeable and experienced about safeguarding vulnerable pupils. She is confident and convincing when outlining how she intends to ensure that future pupils are kept safe and protected.
- The child protection and safeguarding policy is well informed by the most recent guidance issued by the Secretary of State. Extensive hyperlinks make this guidance and other useful information easy to access. The policy outlines helpful information about a wide range of safeguarding matters, alongside the school's own intended procedures. While the policy meets requirements, given the proposed school's context, there is scope for greater emphasis on the additional complexities that can exist when safeguarding pupils with SEND.

- The proprietor has made reasonable plans for ensuring that staff are suitably trained, ensuring that the induction programme for new staff begins to address safeguarding from the outset.
- The headteacher has planned sensible steps to ensure that arrangements for an appropriately trained deputy designated safeguarding lead are in place, both in the short and longer term. Policies make clear the steps staff must take, should any concerns arise about the headteacher. These are likely to prevent any conflicts that may otherwise be caused by the headteacher also being a director of the proprietorial company.

Paragraphs 9 and 10

- The behaviour policy aims to provide for a consistent approach to ensuring good behaviour, as well as how staff will respond to and tackle unwanted behaviour. It sets out reasonable expectations of pupils' behaviour, and outlines an acceptable system of rewards and sanctions.
- There are clear policy statements about bullying in both the behaviour policy and a separate anti-bullying strategy. The laudable intended approach is to create a culture where no bullying of any kind, including cyber bullying, is tolerated. The policy outlines specific actions to be taken to investigate and aim to resolve any incidents, allegations or indicators of bullying.

Paragraphs 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16

- A comprehensive and clearly indexed health and safety policy shows the obvious intent of directors to protect the welfare of all users of the building.
- An appropriate fire risk assessment is in place. Systems and documents for logging the regular routine checks referred to in the risk assessment are ready and likely to be workable. Directors have wisely taken expert external fire-safety advice to oversee these arrangements.
- The proprietor has planned suitable arrangements aimed at ensuring other aspects of the welfare and well-being of pupils and staff. For example, provision for keeping admissions and attendance registers are likely to meet requirements. The first aid policy, if implemented effectively, is also likely to provide sufficient provision.
- Directors have drawn up a risk assessment policy that, if implemented effectively, is likely to meet requirements. A wide range of risk assessments have already been completed as far as is practicable before the building is operational.
- All standards in this part are likely to be met.

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

Paragraphs 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21

- Directors know well the checks that need to be made on the suitability of adults. The headteacher understands the diligence required and procedures involved in making these checks.

- The single central record makes appropriate provision for detailing all relevant checks for staff, leaders, governors and contractors. The headteacher has a very clear understanding of the differences between some of the necessary checks, according to role.
- The proprietor has ensured that all requirements in this part of the independent school standards are likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraphs 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 and 31

- The proposed school will be housed in a detached building that was formerly used as an Ofsted-registered nursery. It is suitable for use as educational premises.
- The proprietor has plans to change and improve the decoration, particularly in some of the intended classrooms, to create better conditions for learning for pupils with SEND. However, this work is largely cosmetic, and the building is clean and habitable. The sound and light conditions are such that the environment is likely to be conducive to effective learning.
- Appropriately regulated hot and cold running water is readily available, including suitable mains drinking water. Separate toilet facilities for staff and pupils are available.
- At the time of the visit, work was underway to upgrade the size of toilets formerly designed for use by small children. It is obviously highly desirable that this work is completed before the school opens, but temporary, interim arrangements would still be likely to meet requirements. Similarly, current renovations are likely to enhance further the already adequate facilities for the short-term care of sick or injured pupils.
- There is sufficient outdoor space for recreational activities. The outdoor area is at the rear of the building and suitably enclosed. Due to the former use of the premises as a nursery, available space has been imaginatively designed. The headteacher has rightly identified the significant potential of this resource for the proposed school. The proprietor plans to use local facilities to provide pupils with physical education.
- All standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32

- The proposed school does not currently have a website. Although not a requirement, the proprietor intends to create one, once the school opens. In the meantime, all required information, statements and policy documents are available in hard copy. Directors intend to make this information accessible on request until the website is launched.
- The proprietor is well informed about the information the school must provide to local authorities that place pupils, and in relation to the annual reviews of pupils' EHC plans.

It is likely that the standard in this part will be met, whether or not a website is live.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33

- The updated complaints policy made available at the time of the inspection meets all requirements of this part of the independent school standards.
- If the earlier stages of the complaints process do not resolve a complainant's concerns, provision is made for the complaint to be heard by a panel. The policy specifies that this panel will consist of at least three people, one of whom is independent of the management and running of the school. The policy also makes clear that the parent may be accompanied at both this and earlier stages of the complaints process.
- It is likely that this standard will be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34

- Through the preparations and plans for the proposed school, the proprietor has demonstrated sufficient knowledge and understanding of the independent school standards. Directors have systematically checked that they are able to evidence that all requirements are likely to be met.
- The director, who will also be the headteacher, is an experienced independent school leader. She conveys a clear and convincing vision of what the school aims to achieve and how it will do this. She can articulate well-conceived systems and approaches that she intends to use to ensure that not only are all standards continuously met, but also to realise the ambition to make the school be the best that it can be.
- Seeking both challenge and support, the proprietor intends to form a small governing body. Future governors that have already been recruited are likely to bring a wealth of relevant knowledge and experience. Governors also intend to commission external improvement partners to report to them and act as independent arbiters of quality.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school accessibility plan outlines reasonable steps to increase disabled pupils' participation in the school's curriculum, improve the physical environment and ensure that information is accessible to all.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	146521
DfE registration number	886/6152
Inspection number	10091036

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Keefields Children's Services Limited
Chair	Dr Timothy Cook
Headteacher	Mary McKeeman
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,500
Telephone number	01233 850078
Website	None
Email address	cornfieldsschool@btinternet.com
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	N/A	7–16	7–16
Number of pupils on the school roll	N/A	60	50

- Until the building is properly furnished to make it fully functional as a school, it is not possible to determine that the proposed capacity of 60 is feasible. Directors propose a gradual increase in numbers initially anyway. Consequently, they understand that if they still wish to increase the roll, they will be able to apply for this to be considered at a timely subsequent inspection, once the school is operating.

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	N/A	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	N/A	60
Number of part-time pupils	N/A	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	N/A	60
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	N/A	60
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	N/A	60

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	N/A	11
Number of part-time teaching staff	N/A	2

Information about this proposed school

- The headteacher is also one of two directors of Keefields Children's Services Limited, named as the proprietor. She is also currently the headteacher of another independent school.
- The proposed school will enjoy sole occupancy of a detached property, standing within its own grounds. The property is set back from a busy, predominantly residential street. The building was most recently used as a registered nursery but was likely originally a large residential property. The school will not operate from any additional premises except for using local facilities for physical education.
- The school will offer education for pupils with SEND, most of whom will have an EHC plan. It is anticipated that most pupils will be placed and funded by Kent County Council. The school intends to cater for the following types of need:
 - behavioural, emotional and social development needs and difficulty
 - speech, language and communication needs
 - autism spectrum disorder.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first pre-registration inspection. The purpose of the inspection was to check whether the school is likely to meet the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, if the Department for Education (DfE) decides to register it.
- Before the visit, the inspector scrutinised the policies and plans that the proprietor is required to submit to the DfE when applying to register a school. He reviewed further documentation and procedures on site against the requirements of the independent school standards.
- During the visit, the inspector met with both directors of the proprietorial company, one of whom is the headteacher, to discuss the proposed arrangements to establish the school. He toured the premises and grounds intended to house the school.
- The inspector spoke with the future chair of the proposed governing body by telephone.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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