

Greenfields School

Tenterden Road, Biddenden, Ashford, Kent TN27 8BE

Inspection dates

27–29 June 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher leads with energy and total commitment. She has ensured that the school has continued to improve since the last inspection.
- Leaders and those in positions of governance have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Staff are very dedicated. They work as a happy and collegiate team for the good of the pupils in their care.
- Pupils show good attitudes to learning. Good relationships between staff and pupils mean that classrooms are happy places to be.
- The school's curriculum engages pupils well. The extra-curricular offer is particularly strong and stimulates pupils' sense of curiosity, as well as broadening their interests and knowledge.
- Teachers plan learning that meets the needs of individual pupils well. However, leaders know that the professional development of staff should be given a higher priority.
- The recently revised system to monitor pupils' progress needs more time to embed in order for it to become fully effective.
- Most pupils make good or better progress. This is equally true of the gains in their academic achievement as it is of their social and emotional development.
- Communication between school staff and other professionals is strong. This ensures that the welfare of pupils is afforded the highest of priorities.
- Pupils behave very well most of the time. Staff are accomplished at managing situations when pupils' behaviour falls short of what is expected.
- Pupils' transitions into the school are managed very skilfully. This means that the majority of pupils joining the school settle in quickly.
- Attendance is excellent. Most pupils attend the school most of the time.
- Non-teaching support staff make very effective contributions to ensure the health and safety of everyone at the school.
- Those in positions of governance know that they need to strengthen their understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop and refine the system for assessing pupils' progress, so that:
 - leaders and governors can monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the impact this has on pupils' outcomes more effectively
 - teachers can more readily identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding, so that they plan learning that leads to rapid progress and outstanding outcomes
 - levels of challenge for older pupils are raised, so that their academic progress increases in line with their social and emotional development.
- Look outwardly to seek new partnerships that will help further develop the current good practice within the school, as well as providing a wider range of professional development for teaching staff.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has high expectations and leads by example. Her partnership with the assistant headteacher is strong and has led to significant improvements since the last inspection.
- Leaders' self-evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses is honest. They know that there are always areas of the school's provision that could be better and plan for improvement accordingly. However, leaders and governors are not afraid to celebrate the school's many successes, particularly in the way that pupils engage with learning and the positive impact this is now having on raising standards.
- Staff have total confidence in the school's leadership team. They feel that they are listened to and that their contributions are valued. They know that they can ask for help without fear of criticism by leaders.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the strengths in teaching, learning and assessment across each phase of the school. Their monitoring allows them to act when staff need to develop aspects of classroom practice. Teachers are confident that the support they receive from leaders is helping them to improve outcomes for pupils over time.
- The curriculum is a strength of the school. Although this is a very small school, leaders have ensured a breadth and balance of subjects that interest and engage pupils. Younger pupils talked to the inspector with enthusiasm about forest school, swimming and athletics. Older pupils were proud to discuss their art work, which was inspired by their trip to Lemn Sissay's 'Warrior Poet' installation in a local theatre.
- Activities and events that enrich learning and provide pupils with a more rounded knowledge of the world beyond the school gates are of high quality. Trips to theatres and museums are common and great fun, but also support pupils learning. Recently, a chance to take part in a private question and answer session with the cast and crew of a West End show helped pupils understand more clearly the demands of working on the stage.
- The school's supportive culture and therapeutic approach to learning help to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain well. Tolerance and respect for the views, cultures and faiths of others are expected at all times. Diversity is celebrated and explored through specific events such as 'international week', or through visiting speakers. Older pupils in particular are supported well to understand and address aspects of their own or others' prejudices, should they arise.
- Leaders ensure that any additional government funding allocated for individual pupils is put to good use. Most is used to fund resources or enrichment opportunities. Because of the context of the school, this is always done in close partnership with professionals from the local authorities who place pupils at the school. All funding is used for the purpose it was intended and is meticulously accounted for by school leaders.
- Leaders have recently updated and refined the school's system to monitor and assess pupils' progress. The changes have been received well by teaching staff, who are using progress information with increasing confidence. However, more time is needed for the new system to embed before it becomes fully effective.

- Although leaders provide effective support and challenge, they acknowledge that teaching staff will benefit from developing formal partnerships and sharing good practice with other local schools. This will also provide a more comprehensive range of professional development opportunities for staff at all levels, as they endeavour to improve the school further.

Governance

- Governance of the school is strong. Those in positions of governance work effectively on behalf of the proprietor to ensure that all of the independent school standards are met.
- The governance committee has a strong strategic overview of the school. Governors have a clear understanding of the quality of the school's therapeutic work and the arrangements to keep pupils safe. They ensure that resources are used effectively and that the health and safety of pupils and staff are given the highest priority.
- Governors are effective at holding school leaders to account for improving the school. They also understand that leaders need governors' committed support if the school is to improve to become outstanding. This is all the more important when the context of the school is taken into account. The chair of the governing committee's assertion to the inspector that governors 'walk hand in hand with the headteacher' is testament to the positive relationships in the school.
- Although governors know the school well, their understanding of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the impact this has on pupils' progress could be better. Recent improvements in the quality of provision mean that pupils are making better progress than in the past. Leaders understand why this is the case. However, governors would benefit from independent advice and verification of the quality of education that pupils receive. This will help the governing committee to be more effective in its drive to challenge leaders to improve the school to become outstanding.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The culture to ensure that pupils and staff are kept safe is strong. Policies, records and procedures are fit for purpose. This includes checks on staff prior to their employment at the school. All staff are vigilant in their efforts to keep pupils safe and are very aware of the additional risks associated with pupils who have high levels of need.
- Staff know pupils extremely well and take action if they think pupils are having problems or behaving out of character. Communication between teaching staff and other professionals is strong. This ensures that pupils' social and emotional needs are met well.
- Staff training is up to date. This includes appropriate training for the school's designated safeguarding leads and further specialist training for those responsible for the recruitment of staff. Staff are also aware of current government guidance about keeping pupils safe.
- Procedures at the start and finish of the school day ensure that pupils arrive or leave school in a well-managed and organised way. The school site is maintained well. Non-teaching support staff take their roles and responsibilities seriously. They know that they are an essential part of the team where the safety of pupils and other adults is concerned.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Classrooms are happy places where staff work hard to meet the needs of each individual pupil. Teachers and support staff know pupils extremely well. Expectations of pupils' academic progress and behaviour are high. As a consequence, most pupils are making good or better progress.
- Staff have strong subject knowledge which they use to good effect. This is especially the case in key stage 3, where pupils benefit from the expert knowledge of teachers across a range of subjects, including mathematics, English and art. Specialist instructors for athletics and outdoor learning, for instance, provide pupils with high-quality tuition, as well as broadening the curriculum offer available.
- During classroom visits it was common to see teachers challenging misconceptions, to help pupils make sense of what they were learning in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Evidence in books and folders shows that pupils take a pride in their work and that most are making good progress, albeit from low starting points.
- The quality of teachers' feedback to pupils is good. As a consequence, pupils are constantly challenged to engage in learning and to improve their work. In most classrooms, questioning skills are put to good use, expertly adding layers of complexity to make tasks more demanding.
- During an English lesson, the inspector was treated to a totally off-the-cuff exchange between a teacher and a Year 8 pupil which was conducted entirely in Spanish. The stunned silence which followed was just long enough to allow the magic to hang in the air. Other classroom visits were peppered with examples of pupils enjoying interactions with staff, although, as the headteacher agreed, some staff appear to work harder than their pupils.
- Teachers and support staff are patient, yet persistent. Most of the time, they know when to intervene to add challenge, or when to hold back to give pupils time to work things out for themselves. However, on occasion, expectations could be higher. This is more the case for older pupils who have learned how to become successful learners once more, due mainly to the dedication and commitment of the school's staff.
- The school's system to assess pupils' progress is in a transitional stage. Staff are still coming to terms with how to maximise its use to track progress over time and plan next steps in learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. The focus on a therapeutic approach to improving all aspects of pupils' well-being, including rebuilding their self-esteem and sense of self-worth, is very successful. As a result, most pupils grow in confidence and begin to enjoy coming to school within a relatively short period of time after arriving.

- Pupils' attitudes to learning change for the better the longer they attend the school. There are very clear differences between pupils who are new to the school and those who have benefited from the stability gained through trust in staff and successful learning experiences over time.
- The curriculum is designed to provide a wide range of opportunities that teach pupils to stay safe, both in and out of school. This includes fire safety and learning about the potential dangers associated with social media or when using the internet.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. High staff-to-pupil ratios ensure that the individual needs of pupils are catered for well. Pupils told the inspector that staff care for them, and are always there to help when things go wrong.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Most pupils behave very well most of the time. This is especially the case with older pupils who have been at the school long enough to develop positive relationships with staff. Pupils disapprove of poor behaviour, especially if it disrupts their learning.
- Due to the very complex needs of pupils, staff are aware of the potential for disruptive behaviour to escalate without warning. Anticipating problems and providing pupils with the emotional support needed to de-escalate difficult situations are key skills required by all staff. On the whole, they are remarkably successful at doing this. As a result, the school provides a safe and positive learning environment for pupils and staff alike.
- The attendance of pupils is excellent. Many pupils have 100% attendance records. Overall, attendance is much better than that seen in most other schools nationally.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Most pupils make good or better progress in a range of subjects. For many pupils, this is from low starting points, especially in English and mathematics.
- Great importance is put on pupils being ready to learn before they reach the classroom. This ensures that time is not wasted during lessons so that pupils engage in learning as fully as possible. Because of this, staff are increasingly successful at addressing the gaps in knowledge and understanding that most pupils have and outcomes are improving.
- Classroom visits provided clear evidence of most pupils making progress over time, with instances of progress being discernible during some of the lessons that were visited. This was certainly the case in a mathematics lesson for older pupils, who clearly enjoyed their growing success in plotting directions using a mix of compass points, time and distance information.
- Some pupils make rapid progress in a relatively short period of time after joining the school, typically towards the end of their first year. This is due to their growing confidence and the admirable ability of staff to inspire pupils to re-engage in learning after their poor experiences in previous schools.

- The school is very successful at overcoming the considerable barriers to learning faced by many pupils. Staff understand the importance of building success into their lessons. Levels of challenge are pitched well in most instances. However, on some occasions, pupils would benefit from higher expectations in order for them to make more rapid progress. This is especially the case for older pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	131780
DfE registration number	886/6084
Inspection number	10006331

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 category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	12
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Childhood First
Chair	Simon Villette
Headteacher	Carole Cox
Annual fees (day pupils)	£59,020
Telephone number	01580 292523
Website	www.childhoodfirst.org.uk
Email address	greenfieldsschool@childhoodfirst.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–16 May 2012

Information about this school

- Greenfields is an independent special school, registered for up to 15 pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs. Currently, there are 12 pupils on roll.
- The school admits boys and girls aged between five and 14. At the time of this inspection, there were no pupils at the school under the age of eight.
- The last standard inspection took place in May 2012, when the school's overall effectiveness was judged to be good and all of the independent school standards were found to be met.

- The school forms part of a therapeutic community managed by Childhood First, a registered charity.
- All pupils are in the care of local authorities. Most have an education, health and care plan. Many pupils have histories of disrupted schooling.
- The school offers a therapeutic approach to teaching and learning, with a strong focus on the personal development of pupils.
- Since the last inspection, the school has increased its age range from five to 11 years, to five to 14 years.
- No alternative provision is used by the school.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector carried out a number of classroom visits during the inspection, all accompanied by the headteacher or assistant headteacher. During classroom visits, the inspector assessed pupils' work and talked to pupils informally about the progress that they were making.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the assistant headteacher, and the chair of the governing committee, who was accompanied by one other governor. Meetings were also held with a large group of teaching and support staff, the subject leader for computing, the member of staff responsible for the single central record of staff checks, the site manager, and two pupils as representatives of the school's pupil group.
- A telephone conversation was held with an officer from a local authority which places pupils at the school.
- The views of staff were taken into consideration through the staff questionnaire.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in classrooms and as they moved around the school. He also attended an early morning staff briefing prior to pupils arriving at the school.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documents, records and policies, including those regarding safeguarding and other aspects of the independent school standards. Minutes of meetings of the governing committee, the school's own self-evaluation, improvement planning and information about pupils' outcomes were also taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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