

Southlands School

Vicars Hill, Boldre, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 5QB

Inspection dates

3–5 October 2017

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| 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 | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have ensured that the school has improved notably since the previous inspection. Pupils' achievement has risen as the quality of teaching has improved.
- Leaders have worked diligently to overhaul a number of key processes in the school. This has made a difference. For example, the school's assessment system is comprehensive and is used intelligently by leaders to gauge pupils' achievement.
- The quality of teaching is good and pupils attain well. Many gain good GCSE passes in a range of subjects and go on to follow academic pathways.
- Standards in English are high and have improved significantly in recent times. Pupils demonstrate a secure love of literature.
- Pupils also attain well in mathematics. However, pupils' reasoning skills are less secure in some classes.
- The school's curriculum is personalised in fine detail to enable all pupils to experience maximum success in a variety of subjects and activities.
- Staff, including teaching assistants, are highly intuitive. They strike just the right balance between supporting pupils when needed and stepping back to encourage independence.
- Governors, although not yet fully representative of the whole-school community, are highly committed. However, they acknowledge that further training would increase their overall effectiveness in supporting the headteacher.
- Staff are very positive about the support and training they receive. They are proud to work at Southlands School.
- Transition arrangements are highly effective. Pupils settle in well and quickly experience becoming a successful learner once more.
- Pupils behave sensibly and are well supported in learning activities. However, supervision at playtimes is occasionally less effective.
- Pupils' voices are listened to. They forge strong relationships with adults and with each other.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff are fully trained and keep detailed records of any concerns as they arise. However, record-keeping does not always capture the sequence of events in sufficient detail.

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?

- Strengthen further the quality of leadership and management, including governance, by:
 - accessing regular training opportunities in order to develop the expertise of the governing body
 - ensuring that the views of all stakeholders are reflected through a more diverse and fully representative governing body
 - ensuring that all safeguarding concerns are used to establish a clear chronology of events.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and raise pupils' achievement in mathematics by developing pupils' mathematical reasoning and problem-solving skills.
- Raise further pupils' standards of behaviour by developing the effectiveness of staff supervision of pupils at playtimes.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and governors know the school well. Not only have they ensured that the school is now fully compliant in meeting the independent school standards, but they have also strikingly improved the quality of education that Southlands School provides. The headteacher, ably supported by the head of education, leads with a quiet determination to ensure that pupils achieve their very best.
- Collectively, leaders have taken their time to make sure that the curriculum is carefully balanced, contains a broad range of subjects and offers high appeal to pupils. From the word go, each new pupil benefits immensely from highly individualised timetables. Regular trips and extra-curricular activities, such as a behind-the-scenes tour of the Wimbledon Tennis Championship, help pupils to make links in their learning with life beyond the classroom. Consequently, pupils achieve well and enjoy all that the school has to offer.
- At the heart of leaders' work is their effort 'to actively enable each and every one of the people in our care to achieve their personal best, however it is defined by them or for them'. Thus, the curriculum is highly personalised to meet each pupil's individual needs. Staff are highly alert to the changing requirements of some pupils over time and ensure that timetables and options are adjusted appropriately. Because of the wide range of subjects on offer, pupils are able to follow academic or vocational pathways, with the majority experiencing a high degree of success.
- Systems for managing the performance of teaching staff are thorough and well considered. Teachers are set appropriate and challenging targets. The head of education meets with staff regularly to review targets and offer constructive advice. Staff benefit from a comprehensive training programme. This includes helpful sessions on topics such as understanding autism and pupils' mental health. One member of staff noted, 'I always feel supported and encouraged in my own learning.'
- Staff induction is thorough. Staff receive useful training in a range of aspects including speech and language therapy, incident reporting, equality and diversity, and safeguarding. This ensures that leaders' expectations are fully understood from the off. Staff are prepared very well for the demands of their roles.
- Staff morale is high. The majority of staff say that the school has improved considerably since its previous inspection. All appreciate the significant role they play in improving pupils' engagement with education. One member of staff commented, 'I feel privileged to work at Southlands. Every day I go home proud of the staff team and excited about the next stage of our journey as a school family.' Staff work closely together and it is clear to see that pupils' best interests are held firmly at the forefront of everybody's work.
- Leaders' strategic use of school performance information, in order to raise standards further, is excellent. Leaders ensure that detailed information is gained when pupils join the school. In recent times, the head of education has overhauled the school's assessment systems, adapting the way that information is collated. Pupils' progress is now tracked diligently across a range of subjects. Information is scrutinised in depth and used intelligently to inform school improvement priorities.

- Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is carefully woven into all activities. Topics discussed in assemblies, such as Nelson Mandela's imprisonment, help pupils to develop cultural awareness, empathy and moral responsibility towards other people.
- Parents are positive about their children's experience at school. They feel leaders deal with worries and are helpful. One parent commented, 'Any concerns I have are dealt with promptly. It is a fantastic school.' A minority of parents noted that the timeliness of reviews relating to their child's individual education plan could be improved.

Governance

- The governing body, made up of members of staff and directors belonging to the Cambian Group, meets regularly to consider the school's effectiveness. Governors are highly committed to playing a part in securing ongoing, further improvement.
- Governors monitor school effectiveness closely. Their regular meetings are used efficiently to discuss a number of different aspects such as safeguarding, complaints and meeting the independent school standards. Governors also make good use of external advice, such as when considering the views of the school's improvement partner. As a result of governors' careful analysis, governors make well-judged adaptations to school policies. This ensures that the school's procedures, including those relating to safeguarding pupils, are kept under watchful review.
- Nevertheless, governors acknowledge that some of their work is at an early stage. For example, training for governors is not yet fully established. In addition, the governing body is not yet fully representative of all stakeholders, including parents. This means that not all viewpoints are widely considered in decision-making processes.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's safeguarding policy complies with the latest government legislation and is made available to parents via the school's website. It takes close account of Local Safeguarding Children Board guidelines, but also contains specific detail regarding the school's particular personnel and procedures. For example, key contact details, such as for the school's designated officer, are kept up to date. The policy also provides a useful point of reference for staff, as it contains a wealth of information on a range of safeguarding matters such as child sexual exploitation and radicalisation.
- Leaders ensure that all staff are checked appropriately before commencing employment, including applying the procedures for overseas checks when necessary. All relevant checks are completed and recorded meticulously. Leaders are aware of their duty to refer to the Disclosure and Barring Service if concerns about individual members of staff should arise.
- Staff receive regular and comprehensive training, including the school's designated leads and also staff who are new to the school. Staff are proficient at reporting any concerns to one of the school's designated leads and keeping careful records of their observations. Safeguarding leaders share information correctly with other professionals and agencies where necessary. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement in this aspect, as leaders

do not keep concerns chronologically, to build a fuller picture and maintain a comprehensive overview of each individual pupil.

- Risk assessments are well considered and personalised to each pupil. As a result, pupils are able to participate safely in a host of activities such as food tasting or angling. Staff achieve a high level of success at promoting pupils' independence while ensuring that they are kept safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Expectations of pupils' participation and engagement in classrooms are high. Teachers make good use of the school's assessment information to plan learning that matches the needs of individual pupils well. As a result, the majority of pupils sustain concentration and make good progress, especially in developing their mathematics and English skills.
- Pupils get off to a good start in the primary phase, developing their reading and writing skills well. Pupils enjoy writing for a range of different purposes and are able to transfer skills learned, such as the use of personification, to bring their writing to life. Work is presented well throughout the school. All pupils make good progress, becoming increasingly proficient in a range of writing styles over time.
- Teachers' planning is a strength. Staff make meaningful links to other subjects in order to allow pupils to build their English and mathematical skills. Teachers liaise well with one another, so that relevant skills are taught at the same time to enable pupils the best chance of success. For example, in geography pupils are able to transfer some of their mathematical skills when undertaking a river study. Pupils' timetables are adapted by staff skilfully to enable pupils to experience maximum success.
- Teachers are adept at pitching tasks well so that pupils are able to sustain concentration for extended periods of time. Teachers are highly alert to pupils' individual targets and make good use of rewards to praise pupils who retain focus on the task in hand. As a result of high-quality support, pupils make rapid gains and achieve the individualised targets set for them.
- The teaching of reading is highly effective. For example, in a reading activity pupils in the primary phase were able to read aloud fluently and expressively and then settle to the task purposefully. Equally, in Year 11 pupils were able to confidently compare and contrast two writers' different perspectives. Pupils quickly experienced success and were clearly developing a love of a variety of literature.
- Teachers' questioning is thoughtful and encourages pupils to think deeply. Pupils relish these conversations and revel in achieving well. As pupils move through the school, they become proficient at engaging in debate with one another, challenging each other's viewpoints maturely.
- Teachers and teaching assistants make regular checks on pupils' understanding, offering support or modifying tasks as appropriate. They are highly skilled at picking just the right time to step back and encourage pupils' growing independence. During the inspection, in a Year 8 art lesson pupils benefited from timely support to demonstrate how to draw in the style of the artist Sir Michael Craig-Martin. Once clear, adults were then able to pull away and allow pupils time alone to become fully absorbed by their own creativity.
- Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' success. They know pupils

well and are adept at redirecting pupils should the need arise. One parent commented, 'Southlands staff have expertly managed my child's learning to allow him to succeed.'

- The teaching of mathematics is effective and pupils achieve well. Pupils cover a range of topics including those relating to number, fractions and perimeter. As a result, pupils become proficient in a variety of calculation strategies. However, opportunities to apply their skills to more complex tasks to solve problems are underdeveloped.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- There is a strong culture in the school of providing the personal support each pupil needs to become a success. For example, some pupils who have found education challenging in the past gradually build confidence while participating in community-based schemes such as working at the local otter sanctuary.
- Pupils' voices are listened to. Staff go the extra mile to facilitate meaningful opportunities that make a difference to pupils' lives. Typifying this commitment is the school's success recently in winning a national competition. Commendably, pupils designed a wearable, prototype device that helps people on the autistic spectrum communicate better and convey their emotions.
- Parents have positive views and the majority report that their children are safe and happy at Southlands School. One parent noted, 'My child feels safe and secure and reports that the staff are brilliant.'
- The school council meets regularly and includes representatives from different age groups, teaching and support staff. Pupils are listened to and their views are taken into account when discussing key issues, such as the inclusion of more physical education into their weekly activities.
- The school's curriculum contributes very well to equipping pupils with the skills they need to become independent young adults. For example, in a cookery class Year 11 pupils were able to consider the nutritional value of a range of different packet and tinned foods. They were adept at identifying foods that were not healthy and those that contained nutritional benefits.
- Pupils who attend off-site provision at Brockenhurst College and Sparshot College are able to follow a full range of appropriate courses. Staff work closely with alternative providers to enable these pupils to succeed, and check that they are safe.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The vast majority of pupils attend school regularly. When attendance dips, leaders are quick to initiate a 'best interests' meeting, convening a range of professionals to address any concerns and get pupils back on track. Considering pupils' previous attendance rates, many make a marked improvement after joining the school.
- Pupils typically demonstrate high levels of focus and concentration in lesson times.

Despite pupils' complex needs, staff are successful at not letting inappropriate behaviour get in the way of learning. Teachers and support staff are highly skilled at redirecting pupils when their concentration wanes. Situations which might potentially lead to more problematic behaviour are quickly and effectively diffused.

- When new pupils join, transition into school is extremely effective. This is because arrangements are adapted intelligently to meet each pupil's individual needs. Consequently, pupils settle in well, gaining confidence as they acclimatise to the school's expectations. Parents, too, are appreciative of their children's re-engagement with education. One parent encapsulated the views of others, stating, 'My son has recently started at Southlands. He struggled in his previous school and the improvements that we have seen since he has been at Southlands are beyond our wildest hopes.'
- School leaders, including the school's recently appointed behaviour support lead, keep meticulous records of pupils' behaviour. Pupils' patterns of behaviour are analysed and staff are quick to initiate appropriate additional support when required. This is a 'telling community' and any bullying concerns are treated seriously, communicated to parents and resolved to everyone's satisfaction.
- Pupils integrate well with one another and some form meaningful friendships. All pupils are supervised throughout the whole school day and in all activities, including at social times. However, the effectiveness of supervision, particularly at playtimes, can be variable. This is because some staff do not supervise pupils as closely as is required.
- Staff appreciate the support they receive from school leaders in managing pupils' complex behavioural needs. One member of staff commented, 'In managing pupils' behaviour, I am listened to.'

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils often join the school with low academic starting points, having missed lengthy spells of their schooling. Because of excellent transition arrangements, pupils quickly settle and begin to make rapid progress in a range of subjects. As a result, during their time at Southlands many pupils catch up and attain as well as others nationally, particularly at the end of key stage 4. Many gain a range of good passes in their chosen GCSE subjects, including English and mathematics. Standards continue to rise year on year.
- Following pupils' lengthy periods of disengagement from education, leaders are quick to adapt and individualise their timetables, in order to facilitate a smooth transition back into school. Pupils benefit from excellent support, including that of experienced therapists. As a result, many pupils are able to access learning activities successfully and make good and sustained progress from their starting points in a variety of subjects, including mathematics. In some subjects, particularly English, pupils' progress is excellent and pupils go on to achieve high standards.
- Pupils in the primary department get off to a good start in developing their reading skills. During the inspection, primary pupils read aloud confidently and expressively to their classmates. Planned activities, such as identifying humour in a text, further develop pupils' love of reading and literature. As in the rest of the school, pupils in this department attain particularly well in English.

- Leaders are adept at setting aspirational learning targets for pupils. Pupils try hard and because of skilled teaching, many achieve their goals. For example, over time, pupils make excellent progress in the development of their social and communication skills. Parents are confident about their children's learning experiences, with one commenting, 'I feel very positive that his academic learning will go from strength to strength within this environment.'
- Pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and children looked after, achieve well across the curriculum. The school offers a range of accreditations for older pupils, including ASDAN (a curriculum development organisation and awarding body) volunteering certificates. Pupils experience success, including in GCSE mathematics, GCSE English, GCSE history, GCSE science and computing qualifications. As a result, many go on to study A-level subjects at local colleges, following an academic pathway.
- Pupils are well prepared and supported for their next steps. The school's transition manager ensures that pupils experience college taster days and are well informed about the possibilities that lie ahead.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 116564 |
| DfE registration number | 850/6030 |
| Inspection number | 10035876 |

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.

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| Type of school | Other independent special school |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 7 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 54 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Cambian Group |
| Chair | Anne Marie Carrie |
| Headteacher | Karen Gittins |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £69,500 |
| Telephone number | 020 87356150 |
| Website | http://www.cambianguroup.com/ourservices/service/home/tabid/106/id/8/s/15/xmps/1816/default.aspx |
| Email address | Karen.Gittins@cambianguroup.com |
| Date of previous inspection | 19 November 2014 |

Information about this school

- Southlands School is a co-educational, independent special school. It is located in Lymington.
- Since the previous inspection, the school's registration details have changed. The school is now registered to take both boys and girls from age seven to 19. The school is operational for 52 weeks of the year.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs related to autistic spectrum disorder. All pupils have experienced significant

disruption to their education and some have had considerable periods when they have not been in school, prior to attending Southlands School. The vast majority have been placed by their local authority.

- The headteacher joined the school in September 2015. Cambian Educational Services has been the proprietor since 2004.
- Southlands School aims 'to actively enable each and every one of the people in our care to achieve their personal best, however it is defined by them or for them'.
- The school was last inspected in November 2014 when it did not meet all the independent school standards. In September 2016 an emergency inspection was conducted to look at matters of health, welfare and safety (Part 3) manner in which complaints are handled (Part 7) and the quality of leadership and management (Part 8). The inspection found the school to meet the independent school standards in these aspects.
- The school uses several alternative providers including Brockenhurst College and Sparshot College.
- The school caters for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder. All pupils have severe learning difficulties and associated complex behavioural needs.

Information about this inspection

- The lead inspector observed a range of lessons in a variety of subjects for all age groups. The head of education, one of the school's deputy headteachers, accompanied the inspector during all observations.
- The inspector looked at a range of pupils' work and records of achievement.
- The inspector considered 12 responses to the online parent questionnaire, Parent View, including 11 narrative comments. One parental comment received via email was also considered.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and both deputy headteachers, one who is also the head of education and the other who is the school's designated safeguarding lead. Meetings were also held with other staff with significant responsibilities.
- A meeting was held with a director of the Cambian Group.
- Twenty-five responses to the staff questionnaire were also analysed.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of school documents and reviewed the checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children.

Inspection team

Elizabeth Farr, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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