

Benjamin College

4 Wren Path, Fairford Leys, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP19 7AR

Inspection dates

30 January – 1 February 2018

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

- Leaders and staff share a strong vision to continue to improve the school. The well-being and achievement of pupils is the priority of staff. Leaders have ensured that the independent school standards have been met.
- Pupils' challenging behaviours and anxieties rapidly improve after they have started at the school. Staff, including therapists, are sensitive to pupils' needs. They help pupils to develop a belief in their abilities. Provision for therapeutic care is strong.
- Pupils often start school with low levels of attainment. They make good progress across a range of subjects because teachers typically provide challenging work.
- Teachers are sensitive to pupils' needs. There is a strong focus on balancing academic and personal progress. Staff produce a curriculum that is tailored to each pupil's requirements.
- Safeguarding is effective and all staff are well trained.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Pupils achieve a wide range of accreditations, from entry level to GCSE.
- The proprietor is dedicated to helping pupils overcome their emotional difficulties. However, the proprietor recognises that there is more to do in holding leaders to account for the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. They intend shortly to set up a board of governors to fulfil this role.
- Progress in mathematics is more variable than in other subjects. This is because pupils' skills and abilities are not always carefully checked. Work is not always provided at the right level of difficulty.

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?

- Improve pupils' progress in mathematics by:
 - assessing pupils' skills and abilities, including when they first join the school, so that staff provide work of the right level of difficulty.
- Implement the proposed board of governors so that they can provide greater challenge and hold school leaders to account in all aspects of their work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has a clear vision to provide the best for the pupils at the school. She leads a committed and enthusiastic team of staff who share these aims.
- Leaders' monitoring of the school is effective. School improvement documentation is thorough and provides clear details about further planned improvements. Although the number of school sites has expanded, the headteacher has ensured that the quality of teaching and learning is consistent throughout. She has achieved this by regularly monitoring the quality of teaching and providing useful feedback to staff. Leaders have ensured that staff are well trained to understand the complex needs of the pupils who attend this school.
- Parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted survey, Parent View, are pleased with the school. A typical comment was, 'There is regular liaison and sharing of information about personal and academic progress.' Annual reports are very detailed and cover a range of subjects, including vocational skills.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Staff actively promote British values. For example, they help pupils to understand about different faiths and beliefs. They teach pupils about the importance of showing tolerance and respect towards each other and the wider community. Pupils know about the rule of law and how the police help to keep them safe.
- The curriculum is individually planned to meet the needs of each pupil. It is designed to help pupils re-engage in their learning and improve their skills in different subjects. All the required areas of learning for independent schools are covered. The school actively seeks pupils' views regarding what they want to study, for example whether in music they wish to learn an instrument.
- Learning is enriched by valuable extra-curricular experiences. For example, pupils recently improved their culinary skills by holding a 'come dine with me' event where they planned a menu, budgeted and shopped for ingredients, and prepared a three-course meal. Trips give pupils experiences which enhance their self-esteem. For example, pupils learned to orienteer and climb during a residential trip to an activity centre in Wales.
- Sport plays a large part in school life. Teachers act as positive role models and encourage pupils to try out new activities, such as boxing or fishing. Some pupils enjoy using the gym and planning their work-out sessions. During the inspection pupils spoke of their enjoyment in challenging staff to competitive bike riding.
- All pupils have access to effective careers education. Work-experience opportunities are planned to meet pupils' specific needs. The school has been successful in arranging extended work-experience placements which lead to recognised accreditations.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that the independent school standards have been met.

Governance

- The commitment of the proprietor to the therapeutic care and well-being of pupils is evident. She regularly attends safeguarding training with staff and often visits pupils at

the various school sites. With the assistance of managers, she carefully monitors aspects such as the oversight of budgets and financial resources.

- The proprietor recognises that currently, due to her commitments in setting up another school, some aspects of effective governance are not fully in place. There is no clear challenge to senior leaders on the quality of teaching and the learning and progress of pupils. The proprietor aims to shortly set up a board of governors to address this issue.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a strong culture of safeguarding at this school, and staff take their responsibilities to keep pupils safe very seriously. When asked, pupils say that they feel safe and that staff care about their well-being. All staff are diligent in ensuring that any concerns about pupils are quickly reported.
- Management of safeguarding is highly effective. Each school site has a designated safeguarding lead who regularly liaises with the company's safeguarding lead. There are effective links with a range of outside agencies, including local authorities.
- The recruitment process is thorough, and appropriate checks are recorded on the single central register. All staff receive relevant high-quality training. The school has a suitable safeguarding policy, details of which are published on the website.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have high aspirations regarding pupils' learning. Staff are particularly effective at giving pupils the confidence and self-belief in their own capabilities to try out new and challenging tasks.
- Staff carefully adapt the curriculum to provide work that matches pupils' interests. For example, pupils who had a particular interest in the Holocaust were given the opportunity to study this era of history in greater depth.
- A good rapport exists between pupils and staff. Pupils say that teachers at this school are patient and have a good understanding of their needs. A typical comment was, 'Teachers understand that sometimes it's hard to concentrate for a long period of time, they help us to learn in lots of different ways.'
- Staff have good subject knowledge, they carefully guide pupils to improve their core skills across many subjects. Writing skills, for example, are developed through history, geography and science. Reading for pleasure is encouraged. Most pupils read widely and regularly.
- Assessments of pupils' skills and abilities in most subjects when they first enter the school are usually effective. This enables staff to plan appropriate activities that help pupils to make rapid progress. However, assessments of pupils' mathematical skills are not always so effective. Therefore, staff are sometimes unclear where a pupil has gaps in their learning. Sometimes teachers do not know whether they are providing work of the right level of difficulty.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Ensuring pupils' emotional well-being through an effective personal and social education programme is a key priority of staff. Pupils are taught how to stay safe in a variety of different situations, for example they know about the importance of not giving out personal information when using social media. Therapists work carefully with teachers and regularly review each pupil's personal development. Regular therapy sessions with psychologists, in areas such as play and art therapy, ensure that pupils' different needs are carefully met.
- Many pupils say that before they joined this school they had not considered the importance of eating a balanced diet, keeping healthy or regularly exercising. Enthusiastic staff work hard to change pupils' attitudes. For example, they help pupils to learn about the effects of a good diet and exercise on physical and mental health. For many pupils this has a positive impact. Often improving a pupil's health and fitness is the starting point to them becoming more confident in other aspects of their lives.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Most pupils display challenging behaviours when they arrive. Although many have only been at the school for a few months, most have made huge strides in managing and moderating their behaviour. This is due to the effective use of the school's behaviour management strategy. Pupils are typically friendly towards each other and often show a keen awareness of the needs of others. They say that there is no bullying.
- Staff manage pupils' behaviour in a sensitive way, they know when pupils are anxious. Teachers are skilled in helping pupils to talk about their worries and concerns.
- In lessons, pupils often show a strong commitment to their learning. They have a good understanding about what is needed to be a successful learner.
- Most pupils who attend Benjamin College have previously had poor attendance or substantial periods out of education. All have improved their attendance since they have started at this school.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Most pupils start at the school with low starting points and a lack of engagement in their learning. They quickly start to re-engage in their learning and make good progress across a range of subjects.
- Pupils make strong progress in English. For example, pupils rapidly develop effective skills in spelling and punctuation. Lower-ability pupils in reading are given effective support to develop their skills with age-appropriate books. Pupils often make good progress in developing their writing skills, for example when describing how plots and characters are developed in non-fiction books, such as in 'Anne Frank's Diary'.

- Because work is not always well matched to pupils' needs, progress in mathematics is more variable. However, some pupils who are completing national accreditations, are making stronger progress, such as in their understanding of the multiplication and division of fractions.
- Pupils make good progress in developing their vocational skills, for example in motor mechanics and catering.
- Pupils have the chance to study a large range of entry-level and level 1 accreditations, together with GCSE qualifications in English, mathematics, psychology and art. All pupils who left last year gained GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics as well as other accreditations.
- Pupils are well prepared for their futures. All those who have left have gone into further education, training or employment.

School details

Unique reference number	135805
DfE registration number	825/6042
Inspection number	10025990

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	12 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	10
Proprietor	Benjamin UK Ltd
Chair	Claudette Deysel
Headteacher	Margaret Bond
Annual fees (day pupils)	£35,880
Telephone number	01296 483 584
Website	www.benjamincollege.co.uk
Email address	m.bond@benjamincollege.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–4 December 2013

Information about this school

- Benjamin College is a small school that caters for up to 20 pupils between the ages of 12 and 18. Currently there are 10 pupils on roll, most have been at the college for just a few months. There were no post-16 students at the time of the inspection.
- The aim of the college is to 'provide a consistent and caring environment in which students can develop their full academic, personal and social potential'.
- The school provides education for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils have additional complex needs, such as autism. Nearly all pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- Pupils have typically had a history of academic underachievement. Many have been out of education for some time or have had a disrupted education. Pupil placements are funded

by 10 placing authorities.

- The college is owned by Benjamin UK. The school's sole proprietor provides the governance of the school.
- The school uses no alternative providers.
- The last standard inspection took place in December 2013 when the school was judged to be good and met all of the school standards. Since the previous inspection the college has expanded from five sites to nine.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited five of the school's sites. With the headteacher she visited lessons and looked in pupils' folders. There were informal discussions with several pupils to gather their views of the school.
- There were meetings with the proprietor, a director of the company, the headteacher and other members of staff. The inspector took into account the views of 11 staff who returned the Ofsted staff questionnaire.
- Parents' views were gathered by a discussion with parents and carers and two responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View. There was a telephone call to a local authority.
- The inspector reviewed documents in order to establish the school's compliance with the independent school standards. These included the school's self-evaluation, development plan, behaviour and incident logs, safeguarding records and progress information.

Inspection team

Liz Bowes, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email 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, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/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.

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/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

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 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2018