

Cornfield School

53 Hanworth Road, Redhill, Surrey RH1 5HS

Inspection dates

1 May 2019

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7, 7(a), 7(b)

- Weaknesses in the school's safeguarding arrangements have the potential to put pupils at risk of harm. Several serious safeguarding incidents have not been managed effectively, and leaders do not oversee procedures thoroughly enough.
- The designated safeguarding leaders (DSLs), headteacher and proprietor were not fully aware of all the weaknesses in safeguarding until this inspection. Over time, the work of DSLs, past and present, has not been checked with sufficient rigour and attention to detail.
- Recent changes in leadership of safeguarding have not been clearly communicated. When asked, not all staff knew who the DSL was or who deputised in this role.
- The current DSL is not a member of the senior leadership team and does not have sufficient seniority to carry out some of her responsibilities. She is committed to her role, has undertaken appropriate training and is beginning to make improvements. However, she is not receiving sufficient support for the changes she is making. Communication between the senior leadership team and the DSL is not good enough.
- The DSL maintains a comprehensive record of information about pupils, including concerns about their safety, welfare and behaviour. However, case histories and files are difficult to navigate and do not enable efficient oversight of patterns of concerns. It is not clear what action has been taken to follow up incidents with staff, pupils or other agencies. Some records of investigations of serious incidents, or follow-up actions, are not recorded formally by the headteacher and senior leaders. As a result, communication is unclear and systems for holding staff to account are not effective.
- Some recent serious incidents have not been acted upon promptly and have unnecessarily escalated. In some cases, leaders have not acted with sufficient responsibility or shared information appropriately with other agencies that protect children.
- Advice about keeping children safe, issued by the Secretary of State, has not been given the priority it requires in the school. Although staff have received updates on the latest guidance, they are not all confidently secure in their understanding.

- While most staff are able to list signs of harm or abuse that they would report to the DSL, their understanding of the implications of changes in pupils' behaviour is too superficial. Leaders have not ensured that staff gain a sophisticated and in-depth knowledge of how pupils' difficulties with social, emotional and mental health present themselves over time. As a result, staff are not sufficiently well equipped to manage some pupils' challenging behaviour and conduct.
- The current DSL is rightly challenging senior leaders to support her and improve practice. Staff welcome the new approaches and appreciate the improved levels of communication. However, improvements to safeguarding are at a very early stage. They are not likely to progress rapidly without proper support, guidance and oversight from the proprietor, headteacher and senior team.
- The proprietor has not ensured that the required information is available on the website. Although the safeguarding policy has been updated in line with the latest guidance, the latest version is not published on the school's website. Instead, an out-of-date policy is listed.
- The proprietor and headteacher do not have a close enough working relationship with the local authority. There are positive partnerships with individual case workers, but lines of communication with senior officers in the local authority are not strong. For example, some incidents of allegations against staff have not been reported promptly to the local authority. Misguidedly, the headteacher has been concerned about 'over-sharing' of information, while missing the point of working together to protect children.
- This aspect of the independent school standards is not met.

Paragraph 14

- Staff absence and changes have had a negative impact on levels of supervision and safeguarding. Recent changes to the school's policy on one-to-one working have created additional pressures on staffing. Leaders have not thought carefully enough about how they ensure that there is sufficient capacity to manage this change.
- Over time, an increasing number of pupils have been placed on modified or reduced timetables in order to manage their social, emotional and mental health difficulties. These pupils are not in receipt of a full-time education, suggesting that the school does not currently have the capacity to meet all pupils' needs.
- Although some pupils are progressing well and enjoying their learning, overall absence rates are too high. In addition, too many pupils leave the school site without permission. This demonstrates that staff supervision is not helping to keep pupils in school.
- In general, staff are genuinely committed to pupils and the school. Many have loyally worked in the school for a long time. However, some staff feel that there has been a change in the school's previous positive atmosphere. These staff told the inspector that morale had dipped and that they sometimes felt unsupported professionally. They talked of the need to cover for absent colleagues and the stresses of managing pupils' needs and difficulties. Some feel that recent approaches to supporting pupils lack consistency.
- This aspect of the independent school standards is not met.

Paragraph 16, 16(a), 16(b)

- The school's risk assessment policy is too generic and does not take account of the real needs and difficulties of the pupils in the school. The policy does not show clearly what steps are taken to assess specific risks to individual pupils and the activities they will be participating in. Despite leaders and staff having much experience of educating pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, the approach to managing risk is not strategic or well planned.
- Risk assessments for individuals are weak and not helpful to staff. Staff and leaders do not make effective use of information about pupils to anticipate risk, prevent inappropriate behaviour and de-escalate pupils' anxieties. Strategies recommended for managing pupils' behaviour are scant on detail and do not demonstrate a deep enough understanding of pupils' difficulties.
- There are too many instances when serious incidents could have been prevented if a thorough risk assessment had been made. Even in these cases, staff and leaders do not always act promptly following a serious incident, for example by amending a pupil's risk assessment and reviewing lessons learned.
- Leaders and staff have not taken enough account of some of the current risks to pupils. High absence rates, together with reduced timetables and absconding, are putting pupils at risk of harm. Leaders have not adjusted their practice to meet pupils' needs in the light of these heightened risks. For example, the protocol for pupils leaving the site and going missing does not convey sufficient urgency or forethought.
- Codes of conduct for staff are not written clearly enough to ensure staff's proper understanding of professional boundaries. Some of the school's guidelines about contact out of school and social media are ambiguous and do not make clear what staff's responsibilities are and how the protection of children must come first.
- This aspect of the independent school standards is not met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34, 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b)

- The proprietor has not ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- Overall, there has not been enough oversight of the school from the headteacher and senior team. The school has become too isolated and inward-looking, relying too much on its previously strong track record, without sufficient monitoring and review.
- Safeguarding arrangements have not been prioritised as they should have been. Poor decisions have been made, and some staff and leaders have not fulfilled their professional and safeguarding responsibilities.
- Lines of accountability and responsibility are not clearly defined. Some serious incidents have come as a surprise or shock to the headteacher because she has not overseen the quality of other leaders' work carefully enough.
- There is no doubt about the headteacher's commitment to the school and the high regard in which she is held by most staff. However, she has not ensured that secure, professional systems are in place by which to hold others and herself to account. Not enough attention has been paid to staff capacity, training, and their suitability for the

roles they perform.

- The proprietor has not checked the school's work carefully enough or ensured that there is independent oversight of the school.
- The school does not meet this part of the independent school standards.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection, as set out in the annex of this report. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

School details

Unique reference number	133477
DfE registration number	936/6581
Inspection number	10102479

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	Independent
School status	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	21
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	6
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Vivienne Spence
Headteacher	Jayne Telfer
Annual fees (day pupils)	£44,841
Telephone number	01737 779 578
Website	www.cornerways.org
Email address	cornfieldschool@cornerways.org
Date of previous standard inspection	27 February – 1 March 2018

Information about this school

- Cornfield is an independent special school, catering for up to 25 girls, aged 11 to 18. Pupils admitted to the school have social, emotional and mental health needs. Some have associated special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school is run by Cornerways Ltd, which also manages residential care and fostering services for children who are looked after. A number of different local authorities place pupils at the school.
- Her Majesty's Inspector was aware during this inspection that serious allegations of a

child protection nature were being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate allegations of this kind, actions taken by the school in response to the allegations were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform the inspector's judgements.

- The school does not have any religious affiliation.
- A number of pupils attend vocational courses at East Surrey College. The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the Department for Education because of concerns about safeguarding and the quality of leadership and management in the school.
- This inspection was carried out with no notice.
- Her Majesty's Inspector reviewed the school's arrangements for safeguarding and child protection, including the school's policies, referrals made to the local authority, staff training and the effectiveness of the school's work to protect pupils from risk of harm.
- The inspector considered the school's information about pupils' behaviour, including exclusions and the use of physical intervention.
- Evidence relating to the impact of leadership and management was scrutinised.
- The inspector met with the proprietor, headteacher, other senior leaders, including the designated safeguarding leader and the overall safeguarding lead for the company. She also held an open meeting with all staff and met several members of staff individually.
- She spoke to pupils informally, during and outside lessons. She observed pupils when learning and during unstructured activities.
- The inspector also considered information about the school provided by Surrey local authority.

Inspection team

Janet Pearce, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that—
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 14 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that pupils are properly supervised through the appropriate deployment of school staff.
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that—
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school—
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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