

Inspection of Southlands School

Vicars Hill, Boldre, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 5QB

Inspection dates: 5–7 November 2019

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school that knows its pupils well. Leaders and staff understand the needs of pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder. They set high expectations for pupils' achievement and behaviour. Each pupil studies a bespoke curriculum which is built around their interests, needs and different starting points. Pupils work hard in lessons, when learning outdoors and in the community. Pupils appreciate the support they receive, which helps them to manage their autism, catch up with their learning and prepare them for their adult lives. As one pupil said, 'This school allows me to be myself.'

Typically, there is a calm atmosphere around the school. Well-trained staff skilfully manage pupils' behaviour so that there is rarely disruption to others' learning. As one pupil said, 'If an individual is struggling, staff try to make it better for them, and they are very good at doing this.'

Pupils are generally polite and respectful. Bullying is rare in school. Over time, pupils learn to understand others' needs and behaviour. If pupils do fall out, adults are quick to help get things back on track. However, occasionally, some adults forget to correct pupils if they use impolite language around the school.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Teachers help pupils to understand that through learning, they can be successful in their future lives. Leaders make sure that pupils gain qualifications and accreditations when studying throughout the different academic and vocational pathways the school offers. Pupils' successes at GCSE and A level, along with a strong programme of careers education, help them to achieve their ambitions. Last year all pupils who left the school went on to further education, university or employment.

Pupils say leaders and teachers 'put a lot of effort into our education'. Teachers adapt activities to match how pupils like to learn best. Reading and communication skills are prioritised throughout the school. In the primary phase, pupils who need it receive extra teaching in phonics to help them catch up. Topics are organised so that pupils can use their learning in one subject to help them understand another. For example, pupils used their knowledge of Russian history when studying 'Animal Farm' for GCSE English. However, teachers do not always structure each subject so that the concepts and knowledge pupils learn build on what they already know in that subject year-on-year. This includes checking what pupils know and understand in each subject when they transfer from the primary into secondary phase.

The curriculum includes rich provision for pupils' personal, social, health and economic education. Activities such as swimming and cycling encourage pupils to lead healthy lifestyles. Trips to local shops help pupils learn how to communicate in public and how to use money. Such activities help pupils to broaden their horizons, improve their self-esteem, reduce their anxiety and prepare pupils well for their

adult lives.

Typically, leaders' planning to meet the behaviour and welfare needs of pupils who join the school is very strong. Leaders consider carefully the information provided in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. They make sure staff know how best to support pupils' good behaviour and provide for their well-being. This includes providing a range of therapies, such as counselling and relaxation therapy. As a result, most pupils settle quickly when they join the school.

Typically, leaders' planning to meet the needs of pupils who join the school is very strong. Leaders collect useful information about pupils' previous schooling, and they consider carefully the information provided in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. They make sure staff know how best to support pupils' good behaviour and provide for their well-being. This includes providing a range of therapies, such as counselling and relaxation therapy. As a result, most pupils settle quickly when they join the school. Pupils told inspectors that they especially value the therapies they receive as these help them to understand and manage their autism.

However, leaders recognise that in the past they were not well enough prepared to meet the complex needs of one or two pupils. They have therefore made some urgent changes to improve their communication with a range of agencies when pupils with complex needs join the school.

Since the last inspection, the proprietor has begun to reorganise how the school is led and governed. School leaders monitor the work of the school well. They support staff to improve their planning, teaching and behaviour management where this is needed. A sharper focus on behaviour and attendance has led to a reduction in incidents of poor behaviour and a substantial improvement in pupils' attendance, which is now strong. Staff morale in the school is typically high. Most staff say that school leaders are considerate of their workload and well-being, and that they love working at the school.

There are tighter processes in place than previously to oversee the school's work, led by people with strong credentials in education. Records of governance meetings reflect the decisions leaders make about how they organise the school. Strategic planning focuses on the things that will make a positive difference to pupils' outcomes. However, sometimes there is not enough crossover between these aspects of leadership. For example, leaders have made important changes to improve the transition for pupils who join the school, but monitoring how well this is working is not reflected in the school's strategic plans.

All the independent school standards are met, and the school complies with the Equalities Act 2010. Leaders follow appropriate procedures when they handle complaints. The premises meet all requirements. Work to change some offices into classrooms is being carried out well. A plan to improve the availability of wi-fi around the school site is being considered by the proprietor.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding leaders and staff are well trained and knowledgeable. They know pupils very well and are alert to the complex risks pupils face. The curriculum includes teaching pupils about how to stay safe online and in their community, including from potential abuse and radicalisation.

Safeguarding records are thorough and help leaders join up the information they have about pupils' behaviour, attendance and wellbeing to help keep them safe.

The safeguarding policy meets requirements, is available on the school's website and is implemented well. Arrangements for checking the suitability of adults are secure and whistle-blowing policies used effectively.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- School leaders have done much to improve the quality of the curriculum overall, including through broadening the range of outdoor learning opportunities and through mapping the curriculum across different subjects to help pupils use the knowledge they have in one subject to make sense of their learning in other subjects. Leaders' next steps are to make sure that teachers plan each subject taught so that pupils' knowledge in that subject builds in a logical sequence over the time they are in school. This includes between the primary and secondary phase, where currently transition focuses very well on pupils' skills and abilities, but not securely enough on their knowledge in each curriculum subject.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	116564
DfE registration number	850/6030
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	10121148
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	52
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	7
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cambian Education Group
Chair	Naseem Akhtar
Principal	Karen Gaster
Annual fees (day pupils)	£75,590
Telephone number	01590 675 350
Website	https://www.cambiagroup.com/specialist-education/our-schools/asperger-schools/southlands-school/
Email address	cambianeducation@cambiagroup.com
Date of previous inspection	3–5 October 2017

Information about this school

- Southlands School is a co-educational, independent special school. It is located in Lymington. The school is operational for 52 weeks of the year.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan related to autistic spectrum disorder. The vast majority have been placed by their local authority. Most pupils

have experienced considerable disruption to their education, including long periods of absence from school, prior to joining Southlands.

- Since the previous inspection, the previous chair of governors has been promoted and a new chair is now in place. A new executive principal, Karen Gaster, joined the school in 2018. She oversees the work of the senior leadership team, which has been reorganised to include a new head of inclusion.
- The school is part of the Cambian Education, which is part of The Cambian Group. In October 2018, The Cambian Group was acquired by CareTech.
- Leaders use a range of alternative provisions to broaden the range of courses that pupils study. These include Brockenhurst College, Totten College, The Fortune Centre of Riding Therapy, The New Forest Wildlife Park, Avon Tyrell activity centre, Calshot activity centre and PedAll inclusive cycling.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned Ofsted to carry out the standard inspection earlier in the cycle than previously planned.
- The DfE requested that we consider the wider issues raised by complaints about the school it had received. These included concerns about safeguarding and pupils' welfare. We did this within the scope of the usual activities conducted as part of a standard inspection.
- The inspection was conducted without notice.
- Inspectors met with a range of senior staff, including the vice-principal, head of school and head of inclusion. Inspectors met with a variety of other school staff, including teachers, teaching assistants and therapists.
- The lead inspector met with the regional education lead for Cambian education group, who chairs the governance meetings of the school.
- Inspectors evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding. The school's single central record was reviewed. Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead and discussed safeguarding with staff and pupils. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents relating to safeguarding and welfare, including records linked to work with other agencies and those relating to how the school responds to complaints.
- Inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: reading, English, mathematics and science. Inspectors discussed the curriculum design with leaders, carried out lesson visits, looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils and teachers from the

lessons visited about the curriculum.

- Inspectors analysed school documentation, including minutes of meetings held by those responsible for school governance, the school self-evaluation and development plans, records of leaders' monitoring of the curriculum, teachers' curriculum planning, and information about attendance, behaviour and exclusions. A range of documentation relating the independent school standards was examined.
- Inspectors considered the 11 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the 48 staff responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Inspectors spoke with a variety of pupils during the inspection, including formally with a group of pupils from a range of year groups.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed in and around the school, and during lessons.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Janis Rogers

Ofsted Inspector

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