

# Inspection of Ferndearle

Heather Lodge, 2 Radnor Park West, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5HH

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Inspection dates: 10–12 December 2019

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**Yes**

## What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils hardly ever or never miss school. Considering their often-difficult former experiences of education, this marks an impressive turnaround.

Pupils are at the centre of everything the school does. Adults understand pupils' needs. They help pupils to settle down and begin to learn across a wide range of subjects.

Adults are mindful of pupils' difficulties, but without ever losing sight of the point that the school is about learning. Pupils start to believe more in themselves as they progress, personally and academically. With greater staff expertise in each curriculum subject, pupils could be helped to do even better. This is particularly important for giving all pupils the support they need to become fluent readers.

Pupils experience a close-knit, safe, happy school community. Those from different backgrounds mix well, make friends and support each other. There are heart-warming examples where pupils rise to the challenges of important roles, such as that of 'peer mentor'. Pupils are free from bullying and confident that adults sort out any issues that arise.

Pupils are frequent visitors in the local area. They make full use of the community library, park and sports hall. Visits to the beach, zoo, and a residential trip, for example, provide pupils with further rich experiences.

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

Leaders have maintained some of the school's strengths while it has greatly expanded.

They keep the core purpose of the school at its heart. Leaders and staff have created a nurturing place that makes a genuine difference for pupils who attend.

The positive effect the school has on pupils' personal development and behaviour should not be underestimated.

The school helps pupils start to recognise and regulate their own emotions to help manage their own conduct. Pupils are routinely encouraged to reflect on their personal growth, as well as the value and importance of others.

Pupils' attendance is remarkable, considering the school's context. Impressively, the large majority of pupils have not missed any school so far this year. It is exceptionally rare for any pupil to be frequently absent.

Despite these noteworthy foundations, the quality of education is not strong enough to ensure that pupils thrive in their academic studies.

Leaders have not set out clearly enough how they aim to develop pupils' knowledge, and skills over time, especially as topics are revisited.

Staff are keen to help pupils towards better futures. However, those responsible for leading and teaching subjects do not consistently have the subject expertise to provide the best possible support along the way. They are not always clear about what they want pupils to know, understand or be able to do at the end of the 'topics' set out by the school.

Pupils know they are in the school to learn. They engage well in class. Adults diligently draw on whatever they can find to support their teaching. As a result, pupils produce plentiful work and learn meaningful things in the topics they follow, such as about rocks, soils and fossils in science.

The reliable structure of the school day and the understanding of staff provide well for pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs. There are links between school and therapeutic staff. There are recent encouraging signs of this relationship strengthening further. The school takes adequate account of pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Leaders often review pupils' progress against the long-term targets these plans contain.

There are weaknesses in the teaching of early reading and phonics. Staff are not well trained in this important area. Learning to read is not given the priority it deserves and requires. Staff have carried out simple assessments of pupils' phonics knowledge. They have used these to ensure that reading books broadly match pupils' capabilities. However, in some classes, adults do not encourage a love of reading as much as they could through reading aloud to pupils or sharing stories.

Texts taught to older pupils show high aspirations. Pupils show enthusiasm and a developing grasp of challenging concepts in books such as 'Lord of the Flies'.

Most pupils try hard and behave well according to their needs and difficulties. Staff manage behaviour incidents well. They anticipate situations and defuse them as swiftly as they can to minimise disruption for other pupils. Bullying is exceptionally rare. This is a mark of the positive culture which leaders and staff have created.

The school tries to help pupils find their place in the community and the wider world. For example, pupils recently took part in local Remembrance Day activities. To broaden pupils' awareness of diversity, the school marks key religious festivals, such as Christmas and Diwali. Similarly, pupils are introduced to different cultural influences, recently encountering Indian art.

By her own admission, the headteacher has become 'more distant' from the quality of education in recent years. Subject leaders do not have enough oversight across both school sites to pinpoint what is going well and what needs to improve. Previously, governance has not been tight enough to identify or tackle these weaknesses robustly.

The new proprietorial body has already made a positive difference. Sensitive and thoughtful leadership has helped keep staff on side. Crucially, the smooth transition so far has provided continuity and stability for pupils.

The early stages of more systematic governance are clear to see. All of the independent school standards are met. The new proprietor has started to introduce tighter systems to make sure that there is no slippage. The school's accessibility plan shows an ongoing commitment to improving access for people with disabilities. For example, it outlines how the leaders are improving physical access to the school.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff have been trained in a suitable range of safeguarding matters. They are vigilant and report any concerns to relevant leaders. However, despite receiving training, staff are not all as confident as they could be in their safeguarding knowledge.

Leaders keep detailed safeguarding records. These show they are keen to learn any

lessons to further protect pupils and improve the school's practices. However, the system for organising records does not make it easy for leaders to spot patterns or build a picture about individual pupils. That said, the information held informs regular reviews about individual pupils. Leaders act promptly on any concerns.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and proprietor)**

- Staff do not consistently have secure subject knowledge in the subjects they lead or teach. Senior leaders should strengthen expertise in curriculum subjects. This is with a view to improving the quality of education and raising the standards that pupils can achieve.
- The school has grown considerably, and many pupils attend for longer periods than they have in the past. In this changing context, leaders have not ensured that they have mapped out clearly enough how pupils' knowledge and skills should develop over time. Leaders should consider more carefully what should be taught and when in each subject. Through this work, they should think all the time about how the content of the curriculum builds on what pupils already know and how it prepares them for what they need to learn next. This is so that pupils make better progress across the curriculum.
- The teaching of early reading is flawed. There is not enough emphasis on the teaching of systematic phonics, and some staff have gaps in their own knowledge. Reading for younger pupils is not prioritised as much as it should be. Leaders should ensure that staff are well trained. Leaders and staff should prioritise the teaching of phonics and early reading, so that pupils learn to read as soon as they are able. Staff should also ensure that pupils are immersed in a rich diet of stories and other texts to really encourage a love of reading.
- School leaders have achieved many successes but do not focus sharply enough on all the things that matter. Important aspects of the school's work are sometimes overlooked. The proprietor should improve the quality of educational leadership. This is with a view to bringing the quality of education up to a similar standard as other aspects of the school's work, so pupils thrive.
- Staff work hard to make sure pupils are safe. However, staff are not as secure as they could be about safeguarding, given the complex and vulnerable pupils who attend the school. Similarly, although leaders keep detailed safeguarding records, the organisation of these is not as tight as it could be. The proprietor should further strengthen safeguarding training and procedures. This is so that the safeguarding of these vulnerable pupils is of the highest possible standard.

## How can I feed back my views?

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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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135510
<b>DfE registration number</b>	886/6126
<b>Local authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	10091644
<b>Type of school</b>	Other Independent Special School
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	27
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	None
<b>Proprietor</b>	Compass Community
<b>Chair</b>	Bernadine Gibson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Zara Malyon
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£37,440
<b>Telephone number</b>	01303 850182
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://ferndearleschool.com">https://ferndearleschool.com</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:Zara@ferndearle.co.uk">Zara@ferndearle.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	13–15 September 2016

## Information about this school

- This school has grown considerably since its previous standard inspection on 13–15 September 2016. It has nearly tripled in size.
- At the start of this academic year, a new proprietorial body Compass Community took over responsibility for the school.
- The school operates from two sites, which are a short distance apart: 2 Radnor Park West, Folkestone, Kent CT19 5HH; and 66 Earls Avenue, Folkestone, Kent CT20 2HA.
- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Pupils usually join with significant gaps in their learning. Many have suffered traumatic experiences, and older pupils have usually faced multiple previous school moves.
- Almost all pupils have an EHC plan. Most are children looked after.
- The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision.

## 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.

- We gathered a wide range of evidence across both school sites.
- We met the headteacher, other leaders and staff. We also met the coordinator of therapeutic services and the executive headteacher of Compass Community, who was representing the proprietorial body. We spoke with pupils across both sites and heard some read.
- We took account of the views expressed in three responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and seven confidential questionnaires returned by staff.
- To help understand the quality of education, we looked in detail at certain subjects (deep dives). We did deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, PSHE and science. For each subject, we spoke with the responsible leader, teachers and pupils, and examined curriculum plans for the subject. We visited lessons in the subjects being taught during the inspection and reviewed pupils' work.
- We had a close look at the school's arrangements for safeguarding. This included speaking in detail with leaders and staff about this important work and scrutinising written records. We checked the single central record, which summarises checks on the suitability of adults.

- Throughout all inspection activities, we gathered evidence about whether the school meets the independent school standards.

### **Inspection team**

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sian Thornton

Her Majesty's Inspector



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